

# JOFFRE AND HIS ARMY

CHARLES DAWBARN

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BY CHARLES DAWBARN

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BY

CHARLES DAWBARN

AUTHOR OF "FRANCE AT BAY," ETC.

MILLS & BOON, LIMITED

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IN MEMORY OF  
GENERAL GALLIÉNI  
TO WHOM THIS BOOK  
WAS DEDICATED  
(BY PERMISSION)



## FOREWORD

THIS book is intended as a presentation card to the French army. It is a plain story for plain people, and there has been a deliberate avoidance of any technicalities. In it you will find references to the leading figures in the fighting organisation of France—Joffre and his most brilliant collaborators; and I have tried to render just homage to the “poilu,” who is the French common soldier. Perhaps the most touching thought about that man, whose deeds of glory and pure heroism will inspire the poets for many a long year, is that he represents not the soldier of profession, but the soldier drawn from the most peaceful occupations. Practically the first great encounter of the French with the Germans in the battle of Charleroi, and the subsequent retreat, accounted for a large part of the regular army, and more or less placed *hors de combat* the greater number of its officers. That professional force was replaced by the Reserve and later supplemented by the youngest classes—men culled from the very heart of pacific France. They came to the trenches with all their civilian instincts—it was a peasant and bourgeois army—but in an amazingly short space of time they were vying with the old soldier in the brilliance of their exploits, in their ability to endure supreme hardship with the greatest gallantry, and without

complaint : an extraordinary story of adaptability. And it came to pass in the process of time that there was the army at the front and the army in the rear : the army of the field and the army of the munition factory, recruited from different elements, for the men in the trenches were the peasants, the sons of agricultural France ; and the army of the factories—the munition workers—was composed of the artisan and typical town dweller. And it is as well to remember, when the question of the future of France, after the war, arises, that the peasant supported to a great extent the physical sufferings of the war, the danger of death and mutilation, the exposure in the trenches, the cold and damp, whilst the townsman was harnessed to the intensive labour of producing shot and shell for infantry and guns. I do not insinuate that the townsman shirked the more bitter task. Each time a demand was made upon him, involving sacrifice of life, he also was ready to rise to any height of abnegation. And in the more mechanical branches of the war, such, for instance, as artillery and aviation, it was often a townsman who was the hero, and who gained, by some glowing deed, the precious symbol of the war cross and even, perhaps, the Legion of Honour. A pure Parisian was Guynemer, the sergeant pilot, who, on a monoplane where he was pilot and combatant, bore down six German machines in as many months, and won thus his stripes as sergeant, the military medal—the highest military award in France—the Legion of Honour and the War Cross with seven palms ; and all this at the age of twenty-one. Indeed, in every enterprise that demanded skill and daring the townsman was to the fore. But it is not possible to

differentiate in the heroism displayed by the French. The historian will never point to the bravery of one class and the timidity of another, for there has been bravery everywhere—bravery and heroism of the most sublime sort poured out with lavish hand to the eternal glory of France.

In these pages I have sought to give a glimpse of the “poilu” at work in the trenches, that one may peep a little through the shutters of his soul. For the mind of the “poilu” is strangely barred and curtained, more strictly than the windows in any English east-coast town. The outsider is not permitted to see the light within. Question him and he will proudly boast his vices; concerning his virtues he is silent, and quaintly ashamed; and to understand the mentality of the “poilu,” to discover what manner of man he is, one must rub shoulders with him in everyday life. Upon some of these familiar visits I hope my readers will accompany me, at least in imagination, and will gather some insight into the character of the Soldier of France. I shall, indeed, have ill performed my task if I have failed to show how valiant he is in facing mortal danger, how uncomplaining in the midst of monotonous peril, and in the worst discomforts—waiting the order to attack without the least murmuring, with soldier-like acquiescence in the bitter cold of a winter’s night or in the chill of early spring. He has forged in a surprisingly short time the *âme militaire*; he has exhibited an amazing adaptability. Some had supposed him ill-disciplined, incapable of the highest military virtues. “Is this a school treat?” exclaimed an outraged Britisher as a detachment of French soldiers slouched, singing and whistling down

the road. Yes, a sloppy and disorderly lot they looked, their clothes dirty and ill-fitting, and hung around with their kit like travelling caravans. Surely such men were no soldiers ! There was a large section of English opinion convinced that the Frenchmen would not fight ; that, probably, was the German idea also. What, then, has effected the transformation ? How has the "poilu" become inspired by the highest military courage, and for weeks and weeks, as at Verdun, sustained the most devastating bombardment ? Ah ! that is the secret of this war, that is the secret of the French temperament, that secluded soul, which is not always what it seems to be. It ever carries in it the seeds and possibilities of greatness : seeds that lay dormant until this war germinated them and they developed into the glorious flower of achievement. In an instant this quick and imaginative people awoke to the necessities of the war ; they had every reason to realise its meaning ; it was only too plain. There it was, written in blood and carnage in the invaded departments. England, of course, lacked that object-lesson. Merely the Zeppelins reminded her of the "reality" of the war, with their pitiable toll of innocent lives ; and moreover, the attitude of the authorities, far from insisting upon the realisation of the war and its horror, tended to starve the imaginative side of the campaign. There were, of course, the scenes at the recruiting meetings, the posters and the rest : but that, after all, was undignified, a little pathetic, and sometimes even rang false ; the great diapason of the Country's Call was but rarely sounded. "Your country needs you," said a theatrical-looking poster ; but did it really need one ? One had to be sure of

that. And yet, in spite of these disadvantages, in spite of a despairing and exasperating silence about the achievements and daily heroisms of the army in the field—until one began to think that the only records other than the meagre *communiqué*, were the casualties—in spite, I say, of these drawbacks, in spite of the paucity of the appeal, the response of the young men to this voluntary call was stupefying in its splendour and spontaneity, so that the French were able to say—though they did not always say it with satisfying eloquence—again the fault of those who did not trouble to let them know precisely what the splendid English army and English organisation were doing—that never had the world given such a picture of sacrifice, of absolute, undiluted courage. The men of England were splendid, and only the Government, so ill-adapted to the exceptional, limped painfully, slowly and awkwardly, behind public opinion, instead of springing in front to direct it.

I have said that people at home were not always sure that the French would be equal to the enormous strain put upon them by the tragic events of the invasion, by the systematised savagery of a relentless foe. Perhaps they had dipped into history and become inspired by that wonderful picture that Alfred de Musset draws in *La Confession d'un Enfant du Siècle*. A generation pale, nervous and feverish was born during the wars of the Empire. “Conceived between two battles, raised in the colleges to the roll of drums, thousands of children looked about them with sombre eyes and shrinking, quivering muscles. From time to time their fathers, stained with blood, appeared, raised them on their chests

shining with decorations, and then, placing them on the ground, remounted their horses.

“ There was only one man living then in Europe : the rest filled their lungs with the air that he had breathed. Each year France gave three hundred thousand young men to this man ; it was the tax paid to Cæsar, and if he had not had that mob behind him, he would not have been able to carry out his plans. Never were there so many nights without sleep as in the time of this man ; never has one seen so many desolated mothers, never such silence, the hush around the shadow of death. And yet there was never so much joy, so much life, so much war-like music in hearts. Never was there such pure sunlight as that which dried up all this blood. It was the air of this sky without a cloud, where shone so much glory, where so much steel glittered, that the children were then breathing. They knew well that they were destined to the hecatombs, but they believed Murat to be invulnerable, and one had seen the Emperor pass immune through such a hail of bullets that one doubted whether he could die. Death was so fine then, so great, so magnificent in its smoky purple. . . . The cradles of France were shields and coffins also. There were no longer any old men, but corpses and demi-gods. Nevertheless, France, widow of Cæsar, felt suddenly her wound. She began to fail and slept with so heavy a sleep that her old kings, believing her dead, wrapped her in a white shroud. The old, grey-haired army returned, worn out with fatigue, and the fires on the hearths of deserted châteaux sadly rekindled.”

The war is over ; the children no longer see sabres and cuirasses ; Cæsar is dead, the portraits of Welling-

ton and Blücher hang in the Consulates. Anxious children sit on the ruins of the world, the children that were born at the breast of war, for the war. They had dreamed during fifteen years of the snows of Moscow and of the sun of the Pyramids. Every one was tired, used up, exhausted. The light of life had gone out. The children, when they spoke of glory, were urged to become priests, priests when one spoke of ambition, love and hope; and, whilst life outside was so pale and shabby, the internal life of society took on an aspect silent and sombre. The habits of students and artists were affected; they became addicted to wine and women. And then De Musset speaks of the influence that Goethe and Byron—the two finest geniuses of the century according to Napoleon—exercised over Europe. “Can’t you put a little honey in the fine vases you make?” he asks of Goethe; and of Byron he questions, “Have you no well-beloved near your dear Adriatic?” and adds that though perhaps he, personally, has suffered more than the English poet, he believes yet in hope and blesses God. It is the reign of despair. “The ills of the century come from two causes,” he says: “the people who have experienced the Revolution and Waterloo carry two wounds in their hearts. All that was, is no more; all that will be, is not yet. Do not look elsewhere for the secret of our ills.”

Could he have foreseen the terrific experience through which France was to pass a hundred years from Waterloo, how his tone would have altered into deep commiseration. And yet it is interesting to compare this picture of the years following the Napoleonic wars and the exhaustion which then

revealed itself—the utter hopelessness of every one—with the condition to-day when, with the first pale beams of the sun of peace, France is thinking of the future, already discounting the profit that will be obtained by her victorious and long-suffering arms. What great repose has she not merited? What great reward of peace and plenty? This generation has fought, has given its life with unheard-of prodigality that the new generation may not have to fight. It has purchased freedom at the terrible price of blood—freedom from the slavery of Germany. No. De Musset's picture is no longer true, but it is doubtless this portrait of a puny, bloodless, spiritless France which impressed itself, all the more vividly because of the splendour of the word-painting, upon the foreign observer, and it was perhaps these students of French history who moulded English opinion. De Musset's powerful description was photographed upon the brain, and few realised that the conditions of which he spoke were transitory, and that France had emerged triumphant from her darkest hour when the pulse of her being was but a thread. The France of to-day is not bowed down with despair, but is buoyed with invincible hope. Hope in the morrow, hope in the recreative genius of her people—of their marvellous powers of recuperation. It is pleasant, it is comforting, to note the contrast, to observe the salutary change the century has brought; the France of De Musset shuddered, demoralised, over the cold embers of conflict—a conflict gigantic as it then seemed, but small in face of the sacrifices of the Great War. Even the agonies of Napoleon's invasion of Russia cannot compare with the hecatomb, the awful onslaught that Joffre had to meet and defeat.

Glory to the "poilu," to his courage and constancy. He has saved France; he has gained for her the sweet and fruitful repose of a century wherein her inventive industry and creative genius may be revived; wherein she may excel in the arts, in the most splendid works of peace; wherein she may prove to be the torch-bearer of advanced civilisation, the pioneer—only a prudent and alert pioneer—no longer the dupe to illusions, of that beatific time when there shall be no more war.

Nor in this picture of fighting France must one forget the wife and daughter of the "poilu"; their work has been splendid. In no direction has the national spirit been more finely emphasised. I recall a visit to a typical factory in the east of France, some twenty miles behind the lines, where the workers were women. I was struck by their positive fanaticism. Upon the walls hung mottoes, just as in pious English homes one sees texts of Scripture. One in particular caught the eye by its terse and vivid eloquence: "Bad work may kill your brother!" And I can well believe that there was no bad work in that factory. There was no question of wages; they were never discussed; no one thought of them; they were of no importance. Wages, disputes, strikes! when the men were fighting a life and death struggle a few miles away, and when you could hear plainly the hoarse rattle of the guns when the wind lay in the right direction? Impossible! Instead of striking, women worked themselves to death and often were carried fainting from their tasks after a twelve and fifteen hours' day. And what an example the masters set of untiring devotion. Addressing the Creusot workers in the twenty-first month of the

war, M. Albert Thomas, head of the Ministry of Munitions, spoke of chiefs who had kept to their duties for eighteen hours at a stretch. For them, at least, there were no restorative week-ends and pleasant breaks in public fêtes—nothing but a continuous, back-aching and brain-wearying round. First to realise the shortage of the shells, some six months before the English, the French displayed astounding energy in remedying the defect. Their ant-like industry and powers of organisation, rivalling even the vast enterprises of America, attracted a world-wide admiration as great as for their heroism in the field. And if it awakened an equal homage, its presence was even less suspected than those martial qualities for which, after all, history gives credit and the brilliant proof though we had forgotten it in this talk of perpetual peace, in an atmosphere of material prosperity and a super-civilisation bordering on decadence.

These things are faintly reflected in my pages together with some appreciation of the English. Sometimes it is a little pale, that praise for the gallant ally: the cause of it I have shown already in a rudderless Governmental policy and a Press starved into undue reticence by the Censor. The harm of it was seen in querulous articles from Boulevard pens. "France has borne the brunt, France has bled, let others now do their share." That was during Verdun, when the trumpets had blown the fame of France over the wide earth and there was no note resonating for England—in spite of her casualty list. Had the chroniclers, then, forgotten the glorious stand of the English in the Great Retreat, how they had saved the French army from being

crumpled up by Von Kluck's furious attacks on the left wing, and how they had shown unparalleled resistance against overwhelming odds? No; the French have not forgotten, it is engraved eternally in their hearts. Those who seem to forget adopt a political pose; yet it is necessary to reassert the facts, not to diminish the "poilu," but rather that we may "realise" him the more, that we may regard him as a brother for whom we have laboured and fought, for whom we have shed our blood. England, by her early heroism in the war, contributed to the full development and glory of the French soldier. It is not the least of our satisfactions that we have helped to build the proud monument whereon is emblazoned the imperishable record of his victories. Thus may we cry with greater fervour, "Vive la France! vive son armée!" If we know that army and know its chiefs, we shall be the readier to protest our faith.



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# JOFFRE AND HIS ARMY

## CHAPTER I

### THE AWAKENING

“RATHER than submit to the slavery of the Germans, the whole French nation would perish.” These words of General de Castelnau are no idle boast—the coloured eloquence of a General who wishes to hearten his troops: they are a simple statement of fact. France has left behind eloquence and embroidered phrases: her commerce, her agriculture, her arts are gone. She has only one business, that of fighting: her men are all mobilised. And behind them stand the old, the young, the women and children, waiting their turn, should that turn come. And if France ever lies under the German heel, at least of the French people there will be none left to weep. That is the spirit animating the army of Joffre, that army whose exploits must have impressed even the most unimpressionable by their continued splendour. Never was finer heroism displayed than theirs. And they recognised from the very first the desperate character of the enterprise. It was not a war of chivalry. There has been no incident as at Fontenoy when Lord Hay, addressing the French guards, invited them to fire first. The Germans

carried no sentiment of any kind into the battle-field, where their sole endeavour was to overcome the adversary, and any means were considered legitimate. To them the doubtful honour of the most diabolical inventions for destroying life. This is not the atmosphere—the atmosphere of asphyxiating gas—where chivalry thrives, and the French character, legends, and traditions of fighting, are utterly opposed to such scientific barbarities. “These civilised savages inspire me with more horror than cannibals,” said Flaubert. But far from being overcome and dismayed by German barbarism, the French showed an instant spirit of adaptation; the hideous conceptions of the Hun brain were hurled back to them across the trenches. And horror begets horror. Officers, from the most accomplished generals down to the subalterns, learned with astounding speed the new art of war—this terrible, unscrupulous, brutal combat which, after fearful carnage in the open, as at Verdun, constantly ran itself to earth, settling down into trench war of the most monstrous description.

Protracted trench warfare, it has been said a thousand times, is quite contrary to the French disposition, which is all dash and go and impulse. But to-day we shall have to revise our views, no doubt, and find that the French have mixed with their audacity, with their natural quickness of thought and action and their high receptivity, some of that resistance and tenacity which are characteristically British. Confirmed Anglophiles in France attribute this phenomenon to the moral influence of ourselves—a flattering and satisfying doctrine to our own self-esteem. But the appearance of this

“ new ” virtue extended to all parts of the population, and was so universal that we cannot credit this grand attribute of the French in the hour of their great adversity to anything but their own innate qualities. It was exhibited by mayors of communes, even the most remote, who have been exposed to the brutalities of the invaders; by the clergy to a conspicuous degree—nothing was more touching and remarkable than their absolute devotion in the most nerve-racking conditions. It was shown, indeed, by the whole of the civil population, young and old, and especially by women. How splendid they were! They did their work with extreme quietude, with a positive genius for adaptability, and no illustrated paper published photographs of their uniforms—for they had none. On the first day of the mobilisation the French women turned into the fields to gather the harvest the men had left on the ground. They had no time to choose a suitable costume; no need of exhortations from the Board of Agriculture. They were left to do the work, and they did it without fuss and without parade. Such examples of determination, tenacity, sheer self-sacrifice, courage and abnegation existed in all directions, diffusing a golden light over the country, just as the coloured windows at the Invalides bathe the tomb of Napoleon in a splendid effulgence.

In the army itself the adaptability of its leaders is a thousand times exemplified by the manner in which erudite soldiers who have taught tactics and strategy in the War School, along certain lines, suddenly confronted with the problems of actual war, have seen that they were quite other than those laid down in the text-books, and thereafter have speedily adapted themselves to the new conditions. Some failed, and

there arose the rumour of many enforced retirements from active command. But the inference to be drawn from this was not always correctly stated. The generals in most cases were not incompetent; they correctly applied the old war rules to the situations as they arose; but they were not sufficiently supple; they did not adapt themselves to the new conditions. The officers who proved the most successful were, for the most part, the colonels and majors, who in a few months obtained important commands.

The classic instance of this is General Pétain, who, when the war broke out, was a colonel, and rose with breathless rapidity to take supreme command of the armies at Verdun during that terrific fight which occupied many weeks of the Spring of 1916. Romantic as such a rise may seem to be, it is as well to remember that the new commander was eminently qualified by reason of his long preparation to occupy such a position. He possesses one of the finest brains in the army—which in France for long has been an intellectual profession—and had so trained it that he was able at once to take advantage of the new conditions of warfare which have so materially changed since the area of war was charted for the guidance of commanders.

When the war broke out, France was not ready. We in England have been often accused of our lack of foresight; but the fact that France, living under the shadow of war, at least since the Agadir incident, was unprepared seems to have been incredible folly. How is it to be explained? The explanation is politics, and the pleasant, but alas! entirely false, atmosphere created by the dreams of pacifists. Whilst Germany planned war and pre-

pared for it in the most cold-blooded manner, France was dreaming of peace and behaving as if war were a thing of the past. All her preoccupations were pacific; to her purblind politicians, the real danger was either a struggle between Capital and Labour—and there were not wanting signs that this was probable—or else a largely imaginary conflict between the dispossessed Church and the State. And, again, there was a large party in the nation led by the persuasive eloquence of Jaurès which urged that universal peace was a practical reality. France herself did not want to fight, England showed no bellicosity; Germany, it was true, through her governing classes, displayed a disquieting tendency to bully, but the heart of the people—was not that pacific? Had not Socialism, and the doctrine of the brotherhood of man, taken firm root? The French Socialists were convinced that it had. And so they argued war was a practical impossibility; for, certainly, this great mass of German opinion, penetrated with Socialism and with the ultra-pacific doctrines which go with it, would never permit the nation to be drawn into war for the benefit of the fire-eaters and directors of the great war machine. The wish was father to the thought, and these misguided but well-meaning people were always seeing across the Vosges evidence of the same beneficent principles that manifested themselves at home. The French Socialists were, indeed, to a great extent anti-militarist: did it not take two to make a quarrel? Was it likely that they would be wantonly attacked when they had not the least intention of attacking anybody? Very naturally, I think, they argued in that strain—and the great fault was that the directors of opinion in France, as

in England, made no effort to explore the dark waters of political probability. It was pleasant to walk ruminatingly along the banks and to dream that the good time would always continue. The bomb-shell of the invasion brought the awakening. In a certain sense English politicians were more to blame than the French, chiefly because no one of them with their hard practical Anglo-Saxon sense really believed in universal brotherhood—there was no Jaurès to capture the public imagination by the witchery of words. England realised clearly enough that war between France and Germany was, sooner or later, inevitable, and the high failure of these self-same politicians was that they did not bring home to the public conscience the no less inevitable intervention by England. “But we are not scaremongers! There was too much talk already about the sword and keeping one’s powder dry,” say the apologists. But it is precisely in a pacific interest that the so-called leaders of the nation ought to have spoken. Mathematics is the base of war—and of its prevention; and in this case the sum was easy: merely two and two make four. If England had displayed the precaution that she adopts in other affairs—the caution of the typical citizen safe-guarding his own personal interests—then Germany would have thought a long while before crossing the frontier and would still have been thinking about it. Knowing what we do of the Teuton temperament, revealed more particularly in the report of the camp at Wittenberg, we are convinced that Germany would have hesitated long had she not had the *quasi* conviction of an easy victory. Everything points to that: the rapid defeat of France, and then a swift turning upon

Russia, whose mobilisation is proverbially slow and whose armament was known to be ludicrously inadequate. Undoubtedly a little plain speaking as well as definite and resolute preparations for eventualities would have done much to prevent war. Forces are blind and superior to man, but war was made by man, and man sets the current that renders it inevitable; then, the same human energy directed at the right time and right place could have prevented it.

Nor was there in England the same anti-militarism which prevailed in France amongst a large section hypnotised by the engaging doctrine of high-minded theorists. There was no anti-militarism, for the reason that there was no militarism; England was not a military power. And thoughtful Frenchmen have been immensely impressed by the speed with which she became one. The unchanging England had become changed out of all recognition. I remember that when Rodin went first to England, he was struck by the eighteenth-century aspect of the people and their institutions. In the houses and in the streets he met types such as Gainsborough and Lawrence painted. Their clothes even had not changed, for though English women nominally wear French fashions, they individualise them and adapt them to their own tastes. And this friendly observer was constantly meeting in the unchanging women evidences of the eternal England in their classic features and fresh complexions, their dignified carriage, splendid shoulders and fine open countenances. Even the clothes—the broad hat and the use of scarfs and trinkets for the adornment of the person—signified the same thing.

And in military matters this faithfulness to the past

was every whit as pronounced. The English Army was unchanging in its traditions, habits and customs, in its equipment and even in its names. As M. Germain Bapst, the French battle historian, has pointed out, the names of commanders remained unaltered from the Peninsular War and Waterloo to the Crimea. Men purchased commissions in the British Army until after the Franco-German War, and only a quarter of a century has elapsed since soldiers were whipped. In 1894 there were forty-six sentences of this sort carried out. There was little or no change in the army from the Crimea to the Boer War. Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener were the two magicians who awakened England from her lethargy.

And then consider the continuity of tradition in the English regiments: they bear on their standards the names of the old victories, and their history and achievements can be traced for hundreds of years. Not so with the French regiments. Their identity has been lost in the shifting sands of the Revolution. To quote one instance: the Regiment of Piedmont, which existed in the time of Henry VIII, became a departmental regiment, then the Third of the Line, and then the Seventh—it is impossible to keep pace with its changes. Practically the history of regiments in France stops at the Revolution. That was the moment of great changes when everything was swept away and new principles established. England the immutable, France the fluid, enthusiastic, passionate, artistic, wildly given over to new ideas—what singular destiny has brought the two together as comrades and allies on the field of battle in a union much closer than in the Crimea, where, however,

Canrobert came to the same conclusion as Foch, who repeated the eulogium, at an interval of sixty years, to General Delannes, a former chief of staff: "Once the British Army has agreed to do something, the thing is done." The unchanging spirit, then, the bull-dog tenacity, that tremendous grip that never lets go—these British qualities blend and render powerful the Latin temperament, with its quickness of comprehension and adaptability. Slow to see a new fact, still slower to excite himself, John Bull is the ideal character to play the waiting game, that game of exhaustion of the war. The more wonderful, then, in the eyes of the French that he should have made so prodigious a military effort.

Eminent French military critics have dealt with all the phases of the movement for raising men, first by the old traditional system of voluntarism, then by graduated processes of compulsion. The result was an army whose peer the world had never seen, either for the high training of the men or the quality of the equipment. Already in the Spring of 1916 the English artillery was more numerous than the French, especially in heavy guns. It is true that the shooting of those pieces was not as good as that of our Allies, and that the French sent instructors to coach the English in their own methods; but one need not be surprised that we had not immediately acquired the full science of artillery usage upon which the French have specialised for many years. In the strict co-operation of two armies of differing nationalities working together in the field there must be necessarily certain difficulties and differences, and it is certain that the French did not always comprehend our methods of fighting. The English "stick it out"

is often opposed to their own notion of a judicious retreat. For instance, the "marmites" are falling fast upon the front-line trench; there is a danger of the trench caving in and burying its occupants. Realising the situation, the French withdraw their men to the second line—perhaps three hundred yards behind the other. The British, however, will not countenance this strategic move; they remain; their own flank is exposed. Two rival principles are here in play. Say the British: "Better remain in the trench, because, on the morrow, you must win it back again by a counter-attack which is a wasteful process." "No," say the French, "retreat in time and save your men; you can get it back at a less cost than if you stayed and ran the risk of being decimated by the big shells."

You may see, no doubt, much of the same spirit in the question of guarding or abandoning sections of the line which are difficult to keep. For instance, the French probably would have given up long ago the salient at Ypres, which the English maintained at a considerable cost, mainly for sentimental, at least, for moral reasons, whereas the French would have urged that there was a line behind that would have given a better and easier frontier to defend. None, however, can estimate the moral value to the French of the mere presence at their side of their old rivals and antagonists; and the effect of contingents arriving in France from far-off Canada and Australia, New Zealand and the Cape, has been quite extraordinary. Almost inconceivable, also, has been the material help that Britain has extended to her Allies. To France alone we have advanced £500,000,000, a wonderful achievement in itself, and we have also supplied unending

stores of coals, steel, boots, clothing—material of all sorts.

Of the “poilu,” too, I shall often speak, but you will never realise how big he is—this sometimes unlikely-looking man, hung about with pots and pans and cumbered with all sorts of strange impedimenta. And he is often a poet as well as a hero. I wish you could read the letters from him I have been privileged to see, written under the hail of bullets and in the thunder of the big guns. His courage and undying spirit shine through these tender communications which lose so much in the translation, which are untranslatable, in fact—for one cannot translate a perfume or a colour, nor can you put upon cold paper the complexion of a kiss. The “poilu” is peculiarly French in the mood and manner of his life, in his apparent slackness, in the speed with which he braces up at the proper moment, his disgust and objection to mere unintelligent parade, his amused disdain of the “panache,” his admiration for and wholehearted devotion to a man capable of understanding and drawing him out, able to appeal to the particular form of his patriotism, and to fire him with a holy zeal for a holy cause—to a man, in fact, who combines a species of apostolic fervour, a winsomeness and appeal, with the sterling qualities of a real leader of men. Of such men I shall presently speak—men who inspire devotion like Mahomet over his followers, men who bring out the spirituality of war—if so be that one is allowed to speak of its spiritual side. For amidst the awful wreck of war—the sufferings it entails, its thousand miseries, the break-up of the home, the desolation of hearths, and the abominations practised upon civilians by the drunken or

cynical soldiers of the Kaiser—there are incidents, as great and as sublime as ever immortalised the saints and martyrs dying for their religion, suffering nameless tortures that, in their quivering flesh, they might represent, for ever, the sustaining power of God. Of such heroism, of such priceless sacrifice this war is full—so full, that one knows not where to begin, and certainly would not know where to end, in a recital of deeds of valour and of splendour, irradiating poor human nature with a glow of glory whose beams will reach Eternity. Yet this war, despite its horror, despite the fact that it has filled the streets of every big town in France with a melancholy line of cripples, of men hopelessly maimed, who must go through the remainder of their existence on this earth with diminished vigour, has taught lessons and inculcated warnings which must continue through the years to bear their fruit and point the way to the right road as well as constituting a danger-signal to national shortcomings.

“Quit yourselves like men.” The war will not have been in vain if this lesson is laid to heart. Let us have no more cant; no more false sentiment; no more idle dreams and castles built upon the foundations of a civilisation that does not exist. If, after nearly 2000 years of Christianity, we have not learnt to love one another, let us not, at least, pretend we do—until we are awakened by a Hymn of Hate. The Peace of the future is to the strong, to the country that is alive to the menace of war, to the nation constantly vigilant, to a people standing to arms. France, with her woman’s soul, clung to a belief in civilisation that should make war unthinkable. But the nations that emerge from this war will have lost

their illusions; they will have grown old and wise, and perhaps a little hard. Yet, at least, they will have learnt to face facts; they will not cry Peace when there is no peace. No, the policy of the nations will be directed by hard facts; the horrors of the camp of Wittenberg are seared into our souls. Dreams and idealism must have no place in our national affairs; such pleasant pastimes bring too rude an awakening.

## CHAPTER II

### THE THREE-YEARS LAW

DURING the Summer of 1913, it became evident that France had to change her military law to enable her to cope with the new forces Germany had arrayed against her. The growth of the Imperial effectives was quite remarkable. They had been increased by new legislation to 876,000; the cover troops, that is, those placed along the frontier in readiness for immediate service, were reinforced by 60,000 men and 500 pieces of artillery. To these numbers must be added the enormous total of the reserve : 4,370,000. Such masses were quite unknown to Europe and inspired legitimate alarm, not only in France, but amongst the other nations. The French Army numbered 567,000 of the active, and 3,980,000 of the reserve, namely, 700,000 fewer than the Germans. Again, of this number, 50,000 were employed in Northern Africa, and the infantry mass was further depleted by the creation of artillery regiments, machine-gun sections and aerial squadrons. It was time, therefore, to act.

When the German Emperor went to Tangiers in 1905, few French people ignored the significance of the step. And when, in 1911, the *Panther* anchored off Agadir, each one realised that it was a new menace, a new challenge to the right of France to Morocco,

notwithstanding that "scrap of paper," the Algeciras Conference. The presence of the cruiser was a protest against the settlement by France of the Moroccan Railway question and against the march of French columns on Fez, which was the symbol of French possession. On both occasions, Parliament went hurriedly to work to vote extra credits, realising the state of unpreparedness, and then sank into its habitual indifference to these matters. But now it was no longer possible to postpone the question of effectives. The German advance was so real that France was forced to take note of it on pain of being relegated, definitely, to an inferior position. It was soon apparent that if the discussion revealed some of the vices of the French Parliamentary system, it also demonstrated that Parliament could rise, on occasion, above party and give an example of enlightened patriotism. The Government of the Republic, indeed, was more alive to its duty than the Imperial Government, which, forty-five years before, had not had the courage to support Marshal Niel's motion for universal service. It was on the eve of the elections and it had its own policy to pursue. It was again the eve of the elections in 1913, but the spirit of the country had changed; temporisation was no longer possible. "Let the Chamber tell me the sum it will place at my disposal and I will say in what measure I can organise the National Mobile Guard," cried Marshal Lebœuf, in the discussion under the Second Empire. It was a preposterous attitude to adopt, quite in consonance, however, with the lack of seriousness of the period. On the very brink of the war, the Government actually proposed to reduce the annual contingent !

The discussion in 1913 was remarkable for several things. One was its great length: it lasted three months; another was the prolixity and poverty of the speeches; hardly one contained the germ of a great idea. The striking contributions in this mad welter of talk could be counted on the fingers of one hand. The majority of deputies, until convinced of the error of their ways, persisted in treating the question as if it were political rather than patriotic. Day by day they mounted to the tribune and delivered orations as empty as air. An exception was the great speech of M. André Lefèvre, who had been Under Secretary of State for Finance, some years before, and had resigned "because he had not enough to do." This novel reason proved his originality; nor was it belied by his methods in the rostrum. He was not eloquent in an ordinary sense; there was no attempt at phrase-making; his facts spoke for themselves. His rather homely appearance gave instinctive force to his unadorned style, but his manifestly deep concern for his subject obviated all need of rhetoric. Thus his sentences were sharp and telling, and free from all pose or attempts at persuasion; and, perhaps, because of that, they carried a double conviction. Facts and figures were so downright in their character that none could dispute them.

He showed that Germany had spent a colossal sum upon her military preparations, and had been indefatigable in their continuance. He showed that, during the preceding thirty years, France had spent £110,000,000 as against £188,000,000 on the part of Germany. Who was responsible for this disparity of such danger to the country? M. Lefèvre showed that no party in the State could escape from censure.

In 1868, each section of the body politic was united—to do nothing: the Republicans, because they would not “turn France into a barracks”; the Bonapartists, because they feared the effect of any action upon their popularity at the elections; and the Government, because it had not the energy to stand against a cry of “reaction.”

But if M. Lefèvre’s speech represented the sound view of the situation, the contribution of M. Jean Jaurès presented features of brilliant generalisation, expressed in lofty language, which always appeals to Frenchmen. His counter proposition had but one defect: it would not have worked. None the less, it was attractive in the abstract and had much to recommend it. Its weaknesses were in the details, which were too fantastic and shadowy for a people who knew what war was and had drunk deep of the bitter cup of defeat. The Socialist leader based his argumentation on the principle of: “la nation armée.” The only way to meet the situation was to utilise, fully, the reserve, he insisted. And in this he was right, as the Great War has shown. Germany’s initial advantage, apart from heavy cannon, machine-guns and a more intensive training of her troops, was due to her rapid mobilisation of reserves.

But the Socialist leader failed, notwithstanding his talents, when it came to working out his scheme. And yet the House, fascinated and half-convinced, cheered him repeatedly—but it voted the other way. This is a common attitude in assemblies which distinguish between personal success and political expediency. The deputies, indeed, could not withhold their support from General Pau, who, with General Joffre, was the special commissioner of the

Government. Yet so much was admirable in the scheme of M. Jaurès that, had he not been known for his anti-militarism—and therefore suspect—he would have fared much better.

What was the matter with France in a military sense? It was a question, was it not, of effectives? But the birth-rate must be arraigned for that. Whatever was done, declared Jaurès, that primary fact could not be disavowed. The Germans were more prolific than the French and, consequently, had more soldiers. "The Three-Years Law is mere plagiarism of the Germans," he said, with an impassioned gesture such as Jean Weber has so happily caricatured. "You are beaten in advance!" he shouted. "Notwithstanding the Three-Years Law you will have an inferiority, at the outset, of 200,000. Thus the sacrifice demanded will aggravate the *malaise*. The equilibrium, already disturbed, will be further accentuated to the extent of 20,000 a year." The population of France was only 43,000,000 and that of Germany 70,000,000. In face of this inequality it was essential that every citizen should be trained to arms. But when he came to this part of the subject, the Socialist orator fell short of his first flights. He was pathetically inadequate. He proposed a military service of eighteen months, then of a year, and finally, from 1918, onwards, of six months. Before their embodiment, the young men were to train for one day a month, and, after their liberation as reservists, one day every quarter.

The war has shown the possibility of training the young soldier in less than six months; but when M. Jaurès presented his scheme none foresaw the fantastic character that the fighting would assume.

If it had presented its habitual physiognomy of massed movements in the open, soldiers of six months' training would have been inadequate to the first shock of battle. Though, as we have shown, there were points in the speech that revealed acute observation and an accurate reading of the times, the treatment of details was deplorable. Here and there his inspiration failed him, as if his mentor, who was known to be Captain Girard, a writer on military topics, had ceased to jog his elbow. One of the least happy of his inventions was his proposal in regard to the "cover." He considered that it was quite adequate with the protection of the Eastern Forts. Again, the frontier departments, being rich and highly industrialised, could organise their own defence. "If you have confidence in the people, if you organise them in unities constituted locally and ready to march at the first sound of the war tocsin, if you launch all these living forces towards the frontier, this, indeed, is the real cover." From this passage you may judge the character of his pleading: the appeal to national sentiment and spontaneous enthusiasm, as opposed to the laboured and essentially mechanical preparation of the Germans. He went to military history to prove that, in 1813, Germany was saved not by her generals formed in the school of Frederick the Great, but by her *landwehr*, which constituted 60 per cent. of the army—peasants hastily armed to defend the soil. Evidently he thought that the old revolutionary spirit would flame forth again in France and suffice against any wanton attack.

He was admirable in his description of the German plan to invade France abruptly and to bring her to her knees by forced marches, by a rapid succession of

blows, and the occupation of her capital, and then to turn swiftly towards Russia. Jaurès found consolation—alas! unwarranted—in the thought that Germany under Prussian domination would never make full use of her reserves. She was afraid, he said, of a democratic army, afraid of that spirit which had enabled France, amidst all her difficulties and lack of preparation, to resist for seven months, in '70, and had given Bismarck and Von Moltke a certain anxiety even after Sedan. Better build strategic railways than barracks, he said, so that an avalanche of men might be poured on the frontier to meet the German mass—a conclusion which was wise enough.

Then there was M. Clementel, a former Minister of Colonies, with some experience of army affairs, who had likewise his little plan to propose. He wished to divide the reserve into eleven classes which would train alternately, for a month at a time, during the year. Parliament rejected it, not because it was fanciful, but because the transportation of 200,000 men a month to their training camps would disarrange the railway systems. M. Messimy—who was Minister of War, during the early days of the Great Invasion, and, like Mr. Winston Churchill, resigned his Cabinet functions to join the army—devised a method whereby the youth of the country would be trained for twenty-six months. How he proposed to bridge the gap between the departure of the time-expired men and the arrival of the new recruits was never made clear. In the light of his subsequent experience as a Colonel of troops, and wounded in action, he probably thought better of his own plan.

General Pau clinched the matter by a series of irrefutable figures. His style differed utterly from

that of any other speaker. He showed the quick temperament of a leader of the old school, who believed in a brisk offensive. Taking umbrage, one day, at the remarks of a deputy, he gathered up his papers and walked out of the House, to the consternation of the Government. Wounded in the 1870 conflict and bearing the token of it in an amputated arm, he looked and spoke with the abruptness of the traditional soldier. As a leader of men he was impetuous and brusque in his methods, rather than a cool calculator like the Generalissimo. He told the House, with a certain impetuosity, that the troops available for national defence were scarcely more than half the German effectives. For, abstraction made of the number serving overseas, France had only 480,000 in her active army, whilst Germany had 830,000. First-class reserve, territorials, and the reserve of the territorials amounted to 3,978,000, of which a part had performed only twelve months' service in accordance with the terms of the 1889 law. In Germany, the reserve amounted to 4,370,000, giving an advantage to that country of 400,000 men. The effectives were constantly growing in the one country, with the advance in population, but remained stationary in the other. Whilst France called up every available man for service, Germany was in the happier position of being able to dispense with a certain portion of her resources. Thus, automatically, an increase in her peace establishment meant an increase in the reserve.

The German law of 1913 gave 63,000 more men to the active army and increased the effectives to 5,400,000. The speaker was even more impressive when, looking forward to 1937—in twenty-four years

from that date—he anticipated that the adverse balance in the reserve would amount to one million and a half. “Since our numerical weakness is undeniable, we must increase the value of our troops,” declared the veteran in the thunder of the House. And he added, that military value was dependent upon cohesion and training. Those two advantages could be obtained by increasing the effectives and prolonging the period under arms. What had the law of 1913 given to Germany? It had given to her a better quality of troops and permitted greater rapidity of mobilisation. The cover troops represented, henceforth, about half the total effective of the German Army. In a few hours, then, half the German Army could enter the field. Out of twenty-three German army corps, eleven were up to war strength and ready for instant service. Finally, this unconsciously eloquent advocate of the momentous change in French armament said that by incorporating a class and a half of their youngest reserve, the German troops of the interior would reach their full strength whilst the French had to receive four or five classes of reserves—a fact which retarded, notably, the mobilisation.

I have given the discussion at length because it supplies the underlying causes of Germany’s military superiority. It explains why the “*attaque brusquée*” succeeded up to a certain point; it explains, also, why the Chamber, after listening to the most authoritative champion of Three-Years, gave M. Barthou, whose courage throughout the tremendous debate was proof against all assaults, an overwhelming majority, and France an additional 180,000 men, whose presence with the colours was of immense

value in the Great Retreat a year later. It is acknowledged by military experts that, had not thoroughly trained troops formed the base of the army, the Generalissimo would not have found to his hand the instrument needed to make the stand on the Marne. The fact is undisputed, and to M. Barthou is due the honour of having refused to disregard the logic of events, for which, alas ! he had every precedent.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATIONAL ARMY

THE national army arose suddenly out of the blood and turmoil of the Revolution. The country was aflame with enthusiasm and informed with the spirit of sacrifice. The urgency of the times was well represented by the law of March 4, 1791, which declared in all the ardour of the First Republic : "The service of the country is a civic and general duty." That fine definition was born of the need of the nation to defend itself against overwhelming odds ; and thus, every citizen was called to a place in the army. The King's forces, which existed before the nation in arms, was composed, on the other hand, of French and foreign mercenaries and a militia raised by royal authority. Though, sometimes, these professionals espoused the popular cause and fought for patriotic purposes, they were primarily engaged to defend the King's interest, and the two were not necessarily identical. Not infrequently it happened that the army was on one side of the barricade and the people on the other. The recruiting sergeant had much to do with the presence of men under the King's banner, and certain vigorous methods reinforced his arts of persuasion. To the regular pay of the soldier was added the prospect of unlimited pillage in foreign war. Generally he fought because he was

paid for it, and his royal master had no particular need to enlist his sentimental interest in the enterprise.

But another change came when the Republic emerged from the glowing brazier of Revolutionary France. The country was beset with numerous enemies anxious to champion the lost cause of monarchy, though the people of these nations, as the official text-books in France tell us, had no quarrel with the people of France. And then, just as one hundred and twenty years later, the German princes led the hosts against France and the response was the uprising of the nation. Since the Revolution, the nations of Europe have adopted national service in acceptance of the principle laid down on March 4, 1791, that it was a "civic and general duty." The Convention ordered levies *en masse*, and this principle was embodied definitely in the enactment of March 23, 1793, which said that from this moment until the territories of the Republic were free from enemies, all Frenchmen were liable to serve; the 2nd Article decreed that young men should fight, that the married men should forge arms and transport material, the women to make tents and clothing and serve in the hospitals, the children to convert old linen into surgeons' lint, and the old men to be carried to the public squares to encourage the warriors, to excite their hatred against the Kings, and promote unity in the Republic. The annual drafts were fixed by the law of Fructidor 19 An VI, and they were recruited by drawing lots and by enrolment. A later law of the Year VII allowed those drawn to purchase substitutes, and it was under this law that Napoleon raised his armies. The system lasted until 1814, when the fortunes of France were at a low ebb. The

country had become tired of a military Imperialism, which had devitalised it and left it with monstrous debts. There was no further taste for arms; voluntary engagements had practically ceased. Thus the abrogation of conscription was tantamount to abolishing the army. The wars of the First Empire had worked out the vein of militarism.

Compulsion, however, had to be re-established, in principle at least, on March 18, 1818, by the Gouvion St. Cyr law. A certain number of men was called up annually and the system existed side by side with voluntary engagements. The annual contingent was fixed at 40,000. There was further legislation on March 21, 1832, due to Marshal Soult. This established that conscription was the normal method and engagements the subsidiary one, but the principle of paying substitutes was admitted. The service was for seven years. The army was divided into two classes: the one performed the full term; the other was *en congé*, and constituted the reserve. The business of finding substitutes rose to such a pitch that agencies were founded to deal with it. It became a crying scandal. Reform was necessary, and it was embodied in a law dated April 26, 1855. By its provisions a fund was formed. Those who wished to buy themselves out were obliged to contribute a certain sum fixed each year by the Minister of War. This money was allocated to bonuses paid to time-expired men to re-engage. The system was not as brilliant as it looked and in practice it worked badly. It lowered the status of the soldier in his own eyes and in those of public opinion, for it gave to national service the character of a punishment or a commercial transaction. Only those remained in the ranks who

could not find a substitute or because of a monetary inducement. Again, it was bad because it created a permanent class of under-officer who regarded the army as his perquisite and shut the door of promotion to the common soldier. The plan, none the less, prevailed until 1868, when, like a trumpet blast, startling Europe out of her sleep, came Prussia's victories over Southern Germany.

The meaning was clear. It meant that, since Napoleon's amazing successes, Prussia had adopted a military *régime* which gave her superiority over her neighbours. It was based on universal service. If France realised how great were her own military shortcomings, she had not the strength of mind necessary to institute a system involving serious sacrifice. Even Marshal Niel, who presented a project to the Imperial Legislature, did not prevail against a conspiracy of optimism based on a total disregard of the facts. The Marshal, indeed, played the ungrateful part of a Lord Roberts in warning his nation against an illusory peace. His was the *vox clamantis in deserto* calling in vain for a real national service. His prophetic eyes had seen the storm, which others preferred not to see. However, the law was altered in a half-hearted effort to obtain reform, but the old facilities for substitution remained. It was then decided to create a national Garde Mobile composed of men excused from active service. Unfortunately, there was no time to organise it before war with Germany broke out. Though it lacked training and experience and was comparatively ill-disciplined, it was not wanting in courage, and proved of utility in the campaign. Lord Kitchener joined it as a young volunteer.

When the *débâcle* came, the whole of Europe was able to read the lesson in the lurid light it flung to heaven. German dominance had been built up on a conscripted army, against which a volunteer and partially conscripted army struggled in vain. It was overborne by sheer weight of numbers. England felt herself guarded by the inviolate sea, but the other Powers of the Continent adopted the principle of national service. In France itself, the law of 1872 was the logical outcome of the dread experience of the *année terrible*. The subsequent legislation, which is dated 1889, 1905, and 1913 aimed at rendering military service more complete and more in accord with Republican equality. The last law, just before the war, imposed the same burden upon each citizen. But an immense amount of discussion was necessary before reaching this simple result, for alas ! political interests in various specious guises had interfered with the pure working out of national defence. As a consequence, exemptions were always considerable. The broadest interpretation was given to "higher education," and examinations, useless from a national point of view or as a test of learning, existed for the sole purpose of allowing the son of the bourgeois to curtail his military service. It was obvious that a knowledge of some out-of-the-way tongue could not be held to compensate, in a national sense, for the loss of a man's service in the army.

A large number of exemptions arose through the laudable desire to lighten the burden for widows and families dependent upon an only son. But, as a result of it, two different categories of reservists were created, those whom the *baccalauréat* had excused after a year's service, and that much larger class of

comparatively unlettered lads who escaped with the minimum term because of being only sons. In their case the year's service was not as efficacious as in the other, where education had made possible a more intensive process of training. And two theories, affecting the use of reserves, see-sawed through the Parliamentary debates for many years. One school held that it was sufficient to season the mass of reservists with long-service soldiers, whose influence and training would be strong enough to lead them to victory on the day of battle; the other side maintained that salvation lay in giving training to as large a proportion as possible, so that units could act independently, and this theory eventually prevailed. The Three-Years Law was the outcome of it.

The law of July 27, 1872, had reaffirmed the old Revolutionary principle that every Frenchman was liable to serve. The military period was fixed at twenty years—from twenty to forty. Thus considerable advance had been made over the earlier legislation. There was no longer any question of a limited contingent or of substitution by money payment, yet, as is clear from my earlier paragraphs, the law did not establish equality. The yearly contingent was divided into two parts; the one served for five years, the other for one year or six months only. The drawing of lots decided to which category a man belonged. Only sons, who supported widowed mothers, the clergy, and members of the teaching profession were excused; also, there existed a one-year service for young men who volunteered before the yearly drawings, who had passed their matriculation and had paid sixty pounds. I have touched

already upon the defects of this system and its doubtful advantage to education.

Then came the law of July 15, 1889, which established a Three-Years service on a basis of absolute equality. It represented the principle of training for everybody, whereas the earlier enactments had created a nucleus of professionals to act as motor to the military machine. No one served for five years under this new system, but then no one served only for six months. The weakness of the measure resided in the wide facilities given for "dispenses." After a year's effective service, exemption could be obtained either for bread-winners or for the theological and general student. Thus the real advantage of the Act was whittled down to a partial instead of a total exemption. The old *voluntariat d'un an* was superseded by a special dispensation for students, but there was no money payment. Yet the law of 1889 caused heartburnings because of its invidious character. Examinations designed to fulfil the letter but not the spirit of the enactment sprang up with the express object of shortening military service. Even art workers and students in commercial colleges were included in the dispensation.

And now comes the statute of March 21, 1905, which purported to promote homogeneity of the reserves and to suppress exemptions so favourable to the *filis à papa*. But its primary object was to reduce the period of service to two years. It was a Revolutionary measure, daring and insensate in its contempt for the danger involved by an obvious reduction in the effectives. This danger was to be conjured in various ways: by employing "auxiliaries" (or the medically unfit) in clerical work; by suppressing

exemptions, and limiting furloughs, and by giving special advantages to re-engaged men.

One of the main objections to the change was that it prejudicially affected the staff of army instructors, who were exposed to a dangerous fluctuation. Just when greater intensity in the training was needed, the quality and quantity of the instructors declined. It was the exact opposite of the condition created by earlier legislation, which rendered the corps of drill sergeants practically inaccessible to new blood. The Bill offered special inducements to *sous-officiers* to remain with the colours, and gave to likely young men in the ranks an opportunity to rise—the class, who, under the earlier laws, would have benefited by the voluntariat. These previous efforts at army-making had created masses of imperfectly trained reserves. The *soutiens de famille* (supports of widows and poor families) represented, for instance, 60,000, which made 600,000 in a decade. Each man in this vast army had had only a year's training, which, though adequate in some cases, was inadequate in the mass. The two-years law sought to remedy this by requiring a minimum of two years from every one. Another important provision allowed grants to be paid to poor families deprived of their sons, which shows that Parliament was solicitous for the weakest in the community, even in such a matter as the national defence.

Finally, there was the law of 1913, passed by M. Barthou, the then Premier, in the teeth of great opposition, and as a reply to the formidable preparations of Germany. This we must leave to the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that the Act provided for a three-years service in the Active Army, eleven

years in the First Class Reserve, seven years in the Territorial Army, and seven in the Reserve of the Territorial. Thus the citizen could be mobilised up to the age of forty-eight. After that, he was no longer liable to be called up.

## CHAPTER IV

### JOFFRE, HIS ORIGIN AND RECORD

THERE is this satisfactory about a Frenchman—that rarely he disdains his origin. He is not the sort of man who spurns the ladder by which he mounted; rather does he contemplate with pleasure every rung of the way. Joffre, in that sense, is typically French. He rejoices in the modest origin which has given him the privilege of building his own fortune. But his pride and his independence come, I think, from his racial attributes. They are indigenous to the soil, to that fruitful soil of the Roussillon, the old province of France which came under the French crown in the reign of Louis XIV, in the middle of the seventeenth century, and as a result of the Treaty of the Pyrenees. Known to-day as the Eastern Pyrenees, and become one of the regular departments of France, it has preserved much of its old Spanish character. It has maintained a particular flavour, like the wine which grows in its smiling vineyards and the peaches that stretch for twenty kilometres, a vast and fertile garden, round Perpignan. The local capital is peculiarly Southern: sunny, wide-spaced, prosperous, embowered in handsome planes. The inhabitants wear the easy grace and captivating manner of people who, under a blue sky, do not find life too hard. Joffre's town of

Rivesaltes is close by, connected by tram and rail. It is less agreeable of aspect than Perpignan, there is less pride in appearances; indeed, it is thoroughly Spanish in style, even if French in the temper of its politics. The inhabitants speak Catalan like their brethren on the further side of the Pyrenees, where newspapers are produced in the tongue, but their sympathies are as wholly French as those of their famous townsman. And what a cult of him there is! Every café and most of the shops have a portrait of him on the large scale, as if a small reproduction would not suffice for his reputation. The album of a local tobacconist is a gallery of the great man in various stages of his development. Old inhabitants contribute anecdotes more or less authentic of his studious yet sturdy youth, of his kindness and modesty, of his astonishing simplicity.

“Yes, he came here years ago and played *manille* with his father and his father’s friends, and he would not allow his old acquaintances to change their manner of speaking to him; they were to say ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ as in the old days. His father’s bit of land had become flooded. ‘You must cut trenches to drain off the water,’ he said to Joffre *père*, ‘I know something about that; it is my *métier*.’ . . .” When war broke out, the inhabitants had no doubt about anything. The country was safe. What was an invasion when Joffre was in command?

The future Generalissimo was a flaxen-haired boy, with a light complexion and a firm, straightforward and kindly expression. There was certainly little of the Southerner either in his face or in the square-cut vigorous figure, but he had the independence of the Catalan in his character. Though an excellent com-

rade and full of fun, he did not like to be interfered with in his work, and was ready to fight his tormentors to secure quiet. Later, the kind blue eyes, wide set beneath the bushy eyebrows, grew steel-like in their expression when an acquaintance tried to take advantage of his amiability to advance a protégé. Joffre has a horror of the recommendation. "Let the young man make his own way as I have made mine," he would say; "that is the only sound method." All his life he has been opposed to patronage; it annoys him, he feels it to be unfair—a mean advantage. When he was appointed Chief-of-Staff, and eventually Commander-in-Chief, in 1911, he received visitors only once a fortnight at his office in the Invalides, because he wished to avoid, as much as possible, bores and protectors of interesting young men. Merit is the only channel which he recognises for advancement. The knowledge of his utter impartiality has robbed his decisions, often sternly disciplinary, of all personal sting. The army felt that in him they had a final court of appeal, pure and fearless.

Boyhood's days at Rivesaltes were unaccompanied by a luxury, which might have dulled the edge of fine ambitions. The little house in the narrow Rue des Orangers where he was born, remains the symbol of his simplicity. The humble bedroom, flanked by dining-room and kitchen, where he first saw the light, the store-room above served by an outside pulley for the raising of winter's stores—all this speaks of a laborious and thrifty life such as the peasantry live hereabouts. The future General was one of eleven children of a working cooper. According to Joffre's sister, the family, of Spanish origin and called Gouffre, is of noble descent; but its fortune had

dwindled when Grandfather Joffre, leaving his native country for political reasons, started as a tradesman at Rivesaltes. He left no particular heritage to his son Joseph, the offspring of middle age, whom he seems utterly to have neglected. Joseph was little more than a working man with a patch of vineyard close to the town. But for a friendly uncle, struck by his intelligence, Joseph Jacques César Joffre—our Joffre—would not have enjoyed the education which was his at the *lycée* at Perpignan and at the Polytechnique in Paris.

It was to his stay in that admirable school for civil and military engineers that he owes the groundwork upon which he has so successfully built. It gave him an immense advantage at the start. Though he passed into the school with the high number of fourteen and became, because of it, a sergeant in his dormitory, charged with keeping order amongst older lads—rather trying to his silent and unassertive character—he did not consistently show the brilliancy that was expected of him. On leaving, his number had fallen to thirty-five, which did not entitle him to high civil employment under Government. Whether as a consequence of it, or because of a pronounced vocation, he joined the Corps of Engineers as lieutenant. Already he had had a taste of the life, sufficiently discouraging, one would think, in the War of 1870, which broke in upon his school career. He served for some months as a junior subaltern in a fort round Paris. Even at that age, he was known for his silent seriousness, and the memory of the national defeat seemed to have sunk deeply into his soul. It made him a patriot, eager to work for France and for her re-establishment. That, more

than anything else, fired his ambition, for he was not one to crouch at the feet of chance, waiting, as an *arriviste* waits, for his own advancement. Not until the moment of his Soudan expedition, in early middle life, did he expand to the full limit of his capacity, and then the call of country and the consciousness of duty done for France were responsible. Before that, he had not shown, I think, any great desire to progress beyond the common mark. But when he saw that he could be useful to his time and generation, a holy zeal possessed him to press on to the great achievement. And his tranquil courage and perseverance were rewarded to an extent that seemed incredible in his early years. But, even so, he would not regard his position as head of the army with complacency or self-satisfaction. "The war found me," he said to a lifelong friend; "I did not seek it." That is the note of the man.

His Soudan campaign, which came when he was a Commandant at the age of forty-three, gave him deserved renown, for it was a masterpiece of organisation. Before that, he had done more or less humdrum work on defences, gaining his captaincy that way, when working on the forts round Paris; he continued in the provinces and in Upper Tonking, where his constructions were aimed at the predatory Chinese. He fought them from Formosa, whither he had gone as a change from spade and trowel work, but partly, I suspect, to forget in change of scene the loss of a beloved young wife. Admiral Courbet, most famous of pioneers in the French Colonial domain, was then concluding the Tonking campaign, and employed him to the general satisfaction. The future Generalissimo was in fighting and fort building showing an

equal talent. Finally, he exhibited a new side to his character by organising an artistic and industrial exhibition at Hanoï. Though wrapped up in his profession and seeming, daily, to take a greater pleasure in it, he showed adaptability and could turn his hand to anything.

His celebrated march to Timbuctoo again showed him as the all-round man, for there he had to think of everything. He had gone out into the wilds for a pacific object, for the building of the Soudan railway, destined to link the Senegal to the Niger river. His new post did not, strictly speaking, appeal to him. It interrupted his course of lectures on fortifications at the School at Fontainebleau, which succeeded to his command of the Railway Battalion of Engineers. It seemed to him like his own first-class interment. Surely there was no glory in building a railway in the desert; yet he was to find it there. At that moment France had become conscious of her colonial possessions, and with it had become the desire for development. A haphazard policy had been amended into a settled plan of pacific penetration by means of the Niger. The railway was to be the great instrument of civilisation, linking the two great waterways and making the desert blossom as a rose. It had begun at Kayes, the capital, under Colonel Galliéni, then commanding in Upper Senegal, and had been pushed to the hundred and sixteenth kilometre. Then yellow fever and a lack of credits from home brought it to an abrupt stop. Commandant Joffre, with his habitual vigour, added kilometre to kilometre until the hundred and fifty-ninth mark was reached.

Thereafter came orders to undertake an expedition to Timbuctoo. The mysterious city had been entered,

just before, by Commandant Boiteaux, who had gone up the river Niger in a flotilla of boats as far as Cabara and there gained the city on foot. It was resolved to extend the French dominion over it and over the loop of the river as it sweeps downward to its ocean outlet. Joffre's duty was to support his superior, Colonel Bonnier, who had given him a rendezvous outside the city's walls. The Colonel was to go by river; Joffre followed the left bank with a force of one thousand, three parts of which were bearers and servants. He started from Segou, two days after Christmas 1893. The rendezvous never took place. The Colonel having made quicker progress, turned back to meet the Commandant, but failed to arrive; the column was assassinated. Only one white officer, Captain Nigotte, escaped to tell the tale in Timbuctoo, where fears were expressed for Joffre's safety. But the latter had acted with great vigour and yet caution in his dealings with the natives. He went quickly to the rescue of the few survivors of the column, chastised the murderers, and then, on February 12, entered the city without further fighting, carrying with him the bodies of the white officers. At the moment when the news reached him, he was engaged in crossing the river, in face of a hostile band of Tuaregs, who had burned his boats at the habitual crossing-place.

More than 500 miles separated Segou from Timbuctoo, and the journey had been beset with peril and difficulty, how difficult and how perilous is admirably told in Joffre's own report of the expedition. He showed good generalship by keeping his men in close order and by throwing out scouts to protect his flanks and rear. At night a careful

watch was set over the camp, and the young Commander went the rounds to see that his black sentinels did not sleep at their posts. Water was a great difficulty, for there was either too much of it or not enough. Great flooded areas, where the river had overflowed, left swamps which could only be passed by circuitous marches in an unknown country. By contrast there was a stark and staring need of wells in a burning desert, where bearers dropped by the way for want of the precious liquid, and communications were endangered because posts left in the rear could not obtain the necessary water. In consequence, the young Commander had to scatter his column through the villages, where existed a species of boycott, for the natives had fled before the advance and had carried off all foodstuffs. Joffre kept a stout heart and a cool head in these trying circumstances. There was a good deal of fighting, especially in the later stages, but Joffre took the offensive, as the safer way, and did not allow himself to be attacked by the enemy. He fought to clear a path for his column.

His initiative and sense of responsibility shone in this crisis. When he entered the city the engineer in him reappeared, and he planned and plotted for the safety of the citizens. Strategic positions were seized and upon them were placed forts and block-houses. Then, in his turn, he acted as political officer and received the submission of the tribesmen. In the midst of these high occupations he received orders from the Governor of the region to rejoin his railway at Kayes. For once in his life he disobeyed and sent his reasons, which, of course, were accepted. When, finally, he left Timbuctoo, he had made

an excellent job of it. He had established his reputation as an organiser and soldier-colonist, and his reward was the red rosette which decorated his tunic of Lieutenant-Colonel. His first grade in the Order had been gained in Formosa. Timbuctoo closed the second colonial phase in Joffre's career.

The third was to open two years later when, as full Colonel, he was given fortification work to do in Madagascar. It was at the moment of British reverses in the Boer War. Certain memories, connected with Fashoda and Dreyfus, rankled in French breasts. The Paris Government felt it was as well to be prepared against possible enterprise on the part of the British fleet in the Indian Ocean; and so the defences of the big island were set hastily on foot. Diego Suarez, the naval base to the north, was fortified by Joffre under the eye of the Governor, General Galliéni, who was then gaining renown for his administration of the island. It was there that the two met and fraternised, as expatriated Frenchmen will, and learned to respect each other's qualities.

Therewith closed the final chapter in Joffre's colonial life. Henceforth he was to work in France, in the immediate path of the great office to which destiny was hastening him. Successively he commanded the 19th brigade of Artillery at Vincennes, and the 6th division of Infantry at Lille, of which town he was the military governor; at Amiens, he was head of the Second Army Corps. Between the stages of Brigadier and General of Division, he was director of Artillery at the Ministry of War. And so he performed the whole cycle of the military art, before arriving at the Superior Council of War

where he was to receive the crown of the chief command. He had served in just the capacities, colonial and metropolitan, which equipped him for his great responsibility. No point in his experience could be considered useless from the building of forts to the construction of railways; from the organisation of a self-contained force on the Niger, to the command of troops in France; from his lectures to military students, to his direction of the artillery.

The supreme honour came to him on July 29, 1911. The *Panther* had dropped a noisy and menacing anchor in the quiet waters of Agadir. In spite of assurances of peace from Germany and the fixity of the pacifist idea in France, clear-sighted people saw the cloud of danger in the sky. Joffre had no misgivings on the subject. One of the earliest questions to occupy him was that of effectives. None but he and his charming wife, whom he had married on returning to France, will ever realise how hard he worked during the three years that intervened before the outbreak of the war. Sundays and weekdays—it was an incessant round. He was deeply convinced that the hour was approaching for the trial of the French military institutions, to which he was called to supply not merely the finishing touch, but, alas! a great deal of the foundation work. That was the tragedy of it, the tragedy of an optimism, which had ignored all German preparations. It had ignored the vast accumulations of engines of war on the frontiers of Lorraine and Belgium, it had ignored the meaning of the caves and subterranean passages prepared in advance in the Champagne and the Soissons district, just as it ignored the other phases of German activity, the systematic corruption, the spying, and the rest.

Thus Joffre came to the post which his persistent work had made a just, if onerous, reward. He was Generalissimo in new conditions. The old duality, which allowed one man to lead in war and another to prepare for it, was swept away. Parliament at last had awakened to its dangers, and MM. Caillaux and Messimy, Premier and Minister of War, had submitted to President Fallières a new decree designating Joffre the Supreme Commander in time of war and the Chief-of-Staff in peace.

It was an admirable choice. If it meant little to the public which had forgotten all about the march on the Niger, it meant a great deal to the army which felt comforted and relieved at the appointment of a sound and thorough administrator. For Joffre, by long contact, knew every cog in the military machine, which he was now called upon to direct. As *divisionnaires* went, he was the youngest of his rank in the army and had still some years before him which he could count his own. Thus he joined experience to a comparative youth, which was all in his favour. Probably the defects rather than the qualities of the organisation engaged his attention and stimulated his amazing energy to even greater efforts. At the age of fifty-nine he was faced with a task to try the strongest head, the steadiest nerves, the most robust health. Happily he possessed all three and placed them unreservedly at the service of the State. France was fortunate in her General-in-Chief. How he succeeded in the colossal burden of the Great War may be left for consideration to a future chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### PREPARATION

WE have seen Joffre in the various stages of his career acquiring that many-sided experience, which was to serve him in excellent stead when, finally, he came to supreme power. Sometimes the engineer officer was uppermost, sometimes the combatant. Though in the latter years, when qualifying for the Council of War, he commanded troops over the very ground where French and English were to oppose the invaders in incredible battles, it is yet true that his experience, with the exception of operations against the Chinese and the Tuaregs on the Niger in his march to Timbuctoo, consisted in the main of engineering exploits with a military aim. Thus he coaxed the desert into a railway track, and thus he cast up mounds of earth and built defensive masonry around Paris and in the provinces and at various strategic points in France overseas. This contact with a larger *patrie* and with the wider aspects of his profession proved of immense service when, in the process of time, he came to his great estate. It was in reviewing the work of his early years, the period of his maturity and then of his later life that he fully comprehended the character of his task. He realised all the elements that make up France, all the elements that must be flung into the crucible of a national army. "Vive la

France" had a new meaning for him, for it meant the France of Asia and Africa as well as the France of metropolitan frontiers.

None the less, for all the pleasure of the prospect, he was sensible of the weaknesses that lay underneath. None better. Had he not himself said in his now famous speech to the Polytechnicians, that you could improvise nothing in war? As a soldier, tried in the service of his country, he was penetrated with that truth. There must be preparation in war—that was the implacable verity. He was emphatic on the point in a speech which must be regarded as one of the documents of the war. For he was speaking to officers, past members of the famous school of which he is a distinguished *alumnus*, and declared with that sense of reality joined to idealism, which is as pleasing to the plain man as to those in search of lofty generalisation, that preparation implied many things. His auditors, at this Old Boys' gathering, strained their ears in the expectation of hearing something removed from the banalities of the usual chairman's utterance. And they were not disappointed. The speech fitted the occasion like a glove; it was no common one, for the Balkan War had broken out. The eventual Commander-in-Chief could not ignore a subject fraught with such consequence to himself and to his hearers (for the most part officers) and quietly aware, no doubt, of the curiosity he had excited, dealt broadly, yet sufficiently, with the situation.

He began by arraying the forces one against the other in the theatre of war. On the one side he said were numbers and on the other preparation. You could tell by the way in which he insisted on the

latter word how much it meant to him. And yet the subject must have been painful, for none realised better than this impressive-looking man, with brow rimmed with white hair and the white of massive eyebrows, that France was not prepared. In elaborating his theme, he told what preparation meant. The whole of national life must co-operate in it. And what were the factors of success? They were of three kinds : material, intellectual, and moral. Under the first came the number and equipment of the troops, under the second and third the capacity of leaders and the patriotism of the people. It was clear that he felt the deep significance of the last quality. Numbers and equipment were certainly important, but patriotism was the soul of the army. "To be ready in our epoch," he insisted, "implies a significance of which those who prepared and conducted war in the past can realise only with difficulty. It would be illusory to count upon the popular *élan* though it exceeded that of the volunteers of the Revolution, if it were not supported by a previous organisation. 'To be ready' to-day, one must have directed, in advance, all the resources of the country and all its moral energy towards the unique end, 'Victory.'" And then he proceeded to utter the phrases which have become classical. They are a synthesis of Joffre's system, the exposition of his inward faith. "One must have organised everything, foreseen everything. Once hostilities are commenced, no improvisation will be valid. What lacks then, will be definitely lacking. The least omission may cause a disaster."

And he proceeds to particularise. The call to arms must reach those for whom it is intended.

Each man must know where to go and how to get there and he must meet there his officers, his arms, and his effects. And over this army which has been organised, equipped, and assembled must be chiefs, military and administrative, imbued with the national theory of the war. "But neither the material organisation of this army nor its training would suffice to assure victory if to this intelligent and strong body a soul were lacking. This soul is Patriotism." That he should lay stress upon the word showed how deeply he had realised how even elaborate schemes of mobilisation could come to naught without this saving grace, without the faith which moves mountains. He seemed to say: "We can save France, even if there are flaws in our preparations, provided we possess Patriotism—the sacred flame." By this alone could soldier and civilian summon the courage to resist reverses.

That Joffre himself accepted the heavy burden of office, showed that he, too, was inspired by a strong love of country and faith in the unlimited powers of French adaptability. He knew that his countrymen were capable of heroic resistance and a persistent and yet strenuous effort, which would astonish the world, because he had read in the heart of the *piou-piou* undying love for country, and because he had watched silently the growth of that national spirit evoked by the brutal provocation of Germany. He knew, also, the delicacy of fitting discipline to democracy and a fierce national spirit of independence and justice to the exigencies of a European War. Intuition and experience told him that only by the finer emotions could the mass be moved, that it would rebel against mechanical methods and harsh

domination and yield only to the influence of enlightened chiefs. Thus he was the man destined to lead and to become the interpreter of the racial spirit of France.

Joffre had established between himself and the soldier in the trenches an irresistible current of sympathy. How, nobody knows, but, at the very commencement, his benevolent activity for the common welfare was a common saying endearing him to the legions under his control, and many were the incidents quoted of his tenderness of heart. He had found a swift way to the understanding and implicit obedience of his troops. By his acts of kindness and consideration he had accumulated a stock of allegiance from which to draw in the supreme hour, when he should say, as on the eve of the battle of the Marne: "Now is the time to conquer or to die." Had he learned these secret arts of sympathy in the wilds of Africa or in the cloistered life he led, like the Pope in the Vatican, when harnessed to his work of preparation at the Ministry of War? I do not know, but I suspect that this trait, like the others, was in-born and developed by urgent circumstance. However we explain it, he became the most popular man in France, a god and a hero, a name to conjure with. "Notre Joffre" was a symbol of success, and of popular confidence. The "magnificent rumour" which had preceded him on the day of mobilisation was crystallised into a solid renown when the public saw with what calm and celerity he assembled troops and with what mastery he played upon the railway keyboard. Napoleon had won his battles with the legs of his soldiers, Joffre was going to win them with his railways.

It is not possible, of course, to repair defects of forty years in two or three years even of unremitting labour; but knowing, as he did, the tone and temper of the men he had to command and the miraculous capacities of their nervous energy he did not doubt for a moment the final triumph, and a species of sublime confidence radiated from him whether at the Ministry or in the field. It was with his friend and companion-in-arms, General Pau, that he began to work at the problems belonging to his position, and the first of them was the effectives. When the intentions of Germany could be no longer disguised, Joffre resolved upon the only course compatible with his responsibilities. He urged the Government to augment the army *pari passu* with the increased numbers on the other side of the Vosges, and, happily, he found in M. Barthou, the Premier, a political leader as strongly impressed as he with the high necessity of action. This admirable statesman became, therefore, one of his collaborators in the national defence. A Deputy at twenty-seven and a Minister at thirty-three, this lawyer and journalist found full scope for his activities only in the wide region of national politics. His quickness of comprehension astonished the experts, and perhaps confirmed their uneasy suspicions that a lawyer knows everything; but M. Barthou's enthusiasm and deep conviction were beyond all question. Some reproached him for being a man of letters, guilty of writing an excellent history of Mirabeau, but he sacrificed ruthlessly his intellectual leisure and his love of reading on the altar of duty. It would seem as if the figure of the Revolutionary aristocrat, which glows from the pages of his book, had communicated his fire to his accomplished and

versatile biographer. So M. Barthou rose grandly to the situation and became, with Generals Joffre and Pau, organiser of the new military plan to save France from her disparity with the German Army.

Joffre occupied himself with his accustomed method to the work of preparing the Government victory. Some one has recalled a conversation which he had with Joffre at this time. The General sits in an arm-chair looking steadily into space. His visitor insists on the impossibility of increasing the annual contingents to the French Army. But, he says persuasively, you can supplement the number by enrolling the black man. "The black man," repeats Joffre, and his mind goes back, no doubt, to his colonial days. He is again building the railway from Kayes to Bafoulabé, he is again on the Niger at Goundam, where they brought him news of Bonnier's massacre with his eleven officers and sixty-four *tirailleurs*. And he asks suddenly : " But what sacred fire will animate them ? Will they ever equal our own soldiers defending, field by field, their own soil ? " Joffre, indeed, had realised the impotency of numbers unless animated by the spirit of a great cause. He would not hear of reinforcing the French regiments by those newly acquired citizens of France in Central Africa. " No, no," he said ; " the Three-Years Law is a vital question ; do not give the enemies of the measure the pretext they seek."

The Generalissimo went to the Chamber, to act, with General Pau, as Government Commissioner during the progress of the great debate. I imagine that the experience was more painful to him than first facing fire in a Paris fort in 1870. For the Socialist opponents of the Bill heckled the Commissioners,

challenging not merely their arguments but also their figures. The temptation was strong upon Joffre at times to retort angrily upon the obstructionists, but he kept his temper and a cold, even tone of courtesy. In his rare interventions he spoke briefly and directly to the point, figures in hand. He maintained throughout an impassive attitude, and looked a formidable figure as he stood resolutely to his guns dominating the wilderness of talk. Even in the lobbies of the Chamber, in the *entr'actes* of the debate, he did not unbend from his attitude of reserve, which, though it angered the obstructionists, impressed them in spite of themselves. Here was the man who could keep his head—the *tête froide* demanded by Napoleon as the first essential of a battle-chief. Pau, on the other hand, was much less calm and was visibly vexed at the shameless opposition. The fingers of his whole arm (for he had lost the other in the War of '70) clinched and unclenched as if anxious to meet the foe at close quarters.

Heartily glad to be allowed to return to his labours, Joffre gave himself more thoroughly than ever to the task of preparation. He occupied himself more particularly with the question of transports, and the perfection of the system that he worked out was revealed at the outbreak of the war, when the Commissariat proved an instant success. The trenches were well furnished with food. But alas! the medical service, which depended not upon the General Staff but upon the Ministry of War, proved in those early days a lamentable failure, for the war had caught it in a state of transition. The mobilisation, itself, impressed every observer by its order and regularity; Joffre revealed himself a master organiser. He was

as prepared as man could be with the time and "material" to his hand. He had trained his body as well as his mind by a just balance between work and rest and physical exercise. He had the true soldier's horror of growing soft. As a captain he was out riding one day when he fell, owing to his horse stumbling, and was carried to bed with injuries to his head. He spent a few weeks of his convalescence at Rivesaltes. Fearing that his mental powers were affected by his accident, he set himself a hard problem in mathematics to test his brain. At the end of three days' silent work, he cried suddenly in broad Catalan from his bed to his brother, who was sharing the room with him, *Soun geuri* ("I am cured"). The anecdote shows his strenuous character and detestation of self-indulgence, and also that he is not quite as reserved by nature as his proud title of *Le Taciturne* would imply. Joffre's taciturnity, in fact, is self-imposed—part of his vigorous system of preparation. It comes, also, from the fact that he is not, naturally, an orator and knows it. Serious and meditative, his temper is not as severe as some suppose; his sternness in all questions of discipline has been forced upon him by duty. On the contrary, it pains him considerably to punish any one, and he suffers as much as his victims when he has to pass judgment upon serious faults and incapacity.

His daily habits made him physically hard, just as his studies equipped him for continuous intellectual labour. The morning gallop in the Bois on a strong horse, such as would have carried Du Guesclin in his wars against the English in the moving Middle Ages, and his walk to the Invalides or the Ministry of War from his distant home in Auteuil gave him the

training he needed. On campaign, the motor-car replaced the healthier exercise, but even then he managed to take long solitary walks which reposed his mind and recreated his body. Even the most pressing matters are not allowed to interfere with his regular rest. To bed at nine and up at six is a rule maintained even in the heat of battle. He feels it to be necessary for the equipoise of his constitution. Joffre has the great Corsican's faculty of suspending his intellectual powers by a mere effort of the will and thus obtains complete repose of the cerebral system. His slumbers were childlike even after Charleroi; on his motor journeys, to points along the Front, he slept profoundly. This recuperative power is inestimable in a commander upon whom is cast a vast responsibility. He was often to be seen in his car behind the lines sunk in restorative sleep, his head inclined to an angle like some tired Atlas, worn with supporting the world upon his broad shoulders.

This man, eminently French in heart and mind, has consistently trained for his great position. Nothing has been too great a sacrifice to secure the victory. To railwaymen, who came to thank him for his praise of them in the mobilisation, he said: "I work for the salvation of France and then I shall disappear." Just as he knows the character of the men under him, he knows the value of his own services to France and throws both into the balance at moments when every gramme of weight is of consequence. He seems able to communicate his own confidence and calm to others—he, so uncommunicative with his low voice, his gentle and pensive manner. Evidently, in this preparation of the soul for combat he must shut out the distressing sights and sounds of battle. He must

not think of devastated homesteads and ruined villages, he must not think of widowed women and weeping children, nor, as he goes along the line of yesterday's battle, must he think of what lies there, of the ghostly army that is still presenting arms to him. All these things he must banish from his mind, in the hardening processes of a great decision—this man who has never given a contrary order. And yet *Joffre l'humain* is as just a title as any which honour him, for it expresses his natural kindness and desire to save life. And a Socialist professor wrote, in an organ of his political faith, that if, after the war, a monument was erected to the great General, no mother need turn her head away from it. Joffre was touched when he read the phrase, for he is as proud of his humanity as of those purely military virtues, which have gone to his preparation.

## CHAPTER VI

### JOFFRE IN ACTION

FLÉCHIER's panegyric of Turenne might have been written for Joffre, for it expresses his traits with a curious exactitude. Said the eloquent Bishop of Nîmes of the Marshal: "He was accustomed to fight without anger, to conquer without ambition, to triumph without vanity. . . . Bolder to act than speak, resolute and determined within when apparently embarrassed, there was never a man wiser or more prudent, who conducted war with greater order and judgment, who had more precautions and more resources, who was more active and more reserved, who better managed things for his ends and who showed more patience in allowing his enterprises to mature. He took measures that were almost infallible, divining not only what the enemy had done, but what he planned to do; he could be unsuccessful but he was never surprised. And, finally, this system was the source of many successful gains. It kept alive that union of the soldiers with their chief which renders an army invincible; and it spread amongst the troops a spirit of energy, of courage and confidence, which enables them to suffer everything."

There is no feature of this admirable portrait which does not fit the man. Joffre belongs to the same noble line and recommences, it has been said,

the same victory on the same theatre with new forms. The history of Alsace will enshrine the two names, for both captains fought there with skill and courage. Turenne's defence of the province occurred almost two hundred years before its cession to Germany as part of the spoils of the victors. If, like other men, Joffre has faults he has also the qualities of greatness. He possesses strength of soul and knowledge formed by study and reflection, and is yet without pedantry. He does not allow himself to be guided by sudden flashes of inspiration, nor does he invent new methods; he prefers a solid system, founded on poise of mind and body and reinforced by calm and consistent attention. Thus he brings to his task a clear and even temperament and a profound and searching judgment. Possessing, perhaps, more character than personality, he has less imagination than clairvoyance and mental vigour, and the fact is an assurance to those he commands. He has the temper to succeed, and is a constant traveller by that road. Slowly his career has unfolded itself, and, at each stage, his nature has deepened and his love of country assumed a warmer tone.

Not a gay and debonair officer, born with title and fortune, he is the son of a working man, who has planned his own career and risen by merit to the top. I do not propose to catalogue Joffre's virtues, or to offer an estimate of his strategy—that must be left to other pens, equipped with the knowledge that staff histories bring, but his career possesses contours that, in their flowing curves, express the beauty and harmony of his life. A "masterpiece of will power and equilibrium," he has known how to inspire the devotion of his soldiers, and this is not the least of his

claims. His ability to extract to the utmost the allegiance of those who serve and to make appeal to their secret sympathies is one of his most precious talents. His character, laborious and unobtrusive, free from ambition, solicitous for the common welfare, has given him an irresistible hold upon hearts, so that men's hands stretch out at the moment of action and he is surrounded and enveloped by an atmosphere of good-will incalculably precious for concerted action. And the women, who Joffre says, are sublime, give him stoically their husbands and sons, rivalling in courage those who lay down their lives. And Joffre, by a mysterious predestination, became the instrument of that sacrifice, limitless during the war. And he never called in vain, for, at his first demand, up rose valiant youth ready and joyous to die for the sweet sake of France. He seems to have the art of communicating that secret vibration of the soul, which moves crowds, without so much as opening his lips. It is a southern gift, belonging to the sunny lands where life runs richly and deeply. And for this reason, perhaps, the south has become the region of great generals. By their inventions and manœuvres they express that species of brimming talent which turns some into poets and plastic workers, others into men of action, statesmen, or charmers of the public ear upon stage and platform. His even temper that takes no umbrage at rival reputations, that seeks in everything only the good of the cause and its strict utility, is the right armour for the martial figure. His silence, like his calm, has its positive and its negative side. It does not spring from lack of thought, but from seriousness and contemplation, just as the other is a proof not of

insensibility, but of a considered system of control. Nor is his unshakable determination the sign of obstinacy or a purblind view, but a bright weapon forged in the recesses of the heart as a defence against adversity and as the ready instrument of achievement. Rarely has a man by such simple means, with no eloquence or artifice, with no advertisement, pose, or pretension, reached such a pinnacle of authority at once subtle and conceded and giving confidence to every one.

When President Poincaré presented the Generalissimo with the highest military reward—the Military Medal—he drew a living portrait of the man: “You have shown in the conduct of your armies qualities which were not for an instant belied, a spirit of organisation and order and method, of which the beneficent effects were extended from strategy to tactics; a cold and prudent wisdom, which knows how to guard against the unexpected; strength of mind that nothing can shake; a serenity of which the salutary example spreads abroad confidence and hope.”

His popularity is as great a factor in his success as his science and military skill. It is born of acts of consideration which, in the opening phases of the war, came to the common knowledge and gave him an immense hold over his men. This or that journal recorded incidents which showed his kindness and humanity. He stayed awhile on his way to the Front to talk to a wounded “poilu,” to ask him about his services, his health, and his family; and a poor woman, who had written to him begging that her son might be placed in a less exposed position, for she had lost three since the war began and this

one was her sole support, received from Joffre the reply that she had done enough for the country and could have back the lad. A dozen instances of the sort, repeated here and there, created such an atmosphere of good-will that allegiance was created in advance, and Joffre swayed his army by sheer affection.

The soldier, in the light of Joffre's humanity, understood delay; he became reconciled to the monotony of trench life, for a forward move, he knew, would cost limitless lives. No, it was better for the war to drag on at this slow game of "nibbling" the enemy than to allow a generation of young lives to be offered to the insatiable god. France could not afford to be lavish with the blood of her children, since the future of the race was as paramount as the fortune of the war.

There were some who said that Joffre's cautiousness was overdone; that the war would have been quickened had he shown greater initiative and greater energy in seizing more sharply the occasions for an offensive. The elements for such a judgment are wanting to us all, but at least this parsimony of life earned him the sublime confidence and esteem of his troops, as completely as his fearlessness in disciplining those who failed in the higher command. The fact that he was impartial, that he was ready, if need be, to chastise his friends, produced a feeling of security invaluable in such a case. The whole country felt that here was a man for whom France had been looking, imbued with a sense of justice, who stood fast to principles, and feared not to apply them. And in valour, as Emerson has said, is always safety. When the army heard that a hundred and fifty Generals had been placed *en disponibilité*, because

of failure in the field, then it realised that Joffre would brook no obstacle to his success.

In a famous interview which he gave to the editor of a provincial newspaper—a lifelong friend—Joffre declared that Charleroi was lost largely owing to the failure of the Generals engaged in it. It was not so much a question of effectives, he insisted, as inferiority in the higher command. “Long before the war, I saw that a great number of our Generals were fatigued; certain seemed unfitted for their duty and below its requirements. I had the intention to rejuvenate the higher command, but the war came too soon. And there were others in whom I had confidence who justified it, but imperfectly.” Energy must go with knowledge and experience, he insisted. “Some were my best friends; but if I am fond of my friends, I am still fonder of France.” The words have become linked with Joffre, and so closely represent him that they deserve to be graven on the monument that must one day be his when he has laid aside his sword.

It was this implacable search for efficiency that gave Joffre such pre-eminence in the army. Yet he is scarcely the type to appeal to the romantic side of popularity. He is rarely represented on horseback, he waves no sword, in figure he looks like a comfortable farmer rather than the traditional soldier; he spends long hours at an office table, and is suspected of moving armies through a telephone. But his appearance—sound, robust, suggestive of common sense—accords with his manner and his methods on campaign. His life in the midst of the terror and tumult of war is as simple as his routine at the Ministry in times of peace. There was no fuss or parade about

Headquarters, even in the most acute phases of the conflict. Everything passed as calmly as if a simple game were being played with counters engaged, instead of thousands of human lives. Joffre directed the huge machine from a bare room furnished with a common deal table, a map or two, a black board, and three cane-bottomed chairs. The privileged visitor who saw him for a few moments found himself faced by a man with the dark undress uniform of the Engineers, with no decorations upon the jacket save the three stars on the sleeve which marked his rank. His conversation, unless the moment warranted expansion, was scarcely more than monosyllabic. A simple "yes," or "no," sufficed; why waste time, when moments were precious? And you went from the room conscious of having met a great personage, impressive by silence, masterful by the flash of keen but kindly blue eyes, from beneath protruding eyebrows. In a neighbouring room was a low murmur of voices on the telephone—officers talking to the Front or receiving news therefrom—and above their heads a mast carrying wires stretched into space tingling perpetually with live whispers of battles, and armies in movement.

This was the nerve centre of the army: a plain building, commodious, simple, effective, strictly utilitarian. Here a large force of officers and assistants did the bidding of the chief; here every morning, and again in the late afternoon, conferences were held between the Generalissimo and his staff. The inner council consisted of three brilliant specialists in strategy, gunnery, and transport. With these he concerted the common measures of the day, the preparation to deliver or parry attacks. When large

and general problems were afoot others of the Etat-Major were called in; or, it may be that a meeting of representatives of the Allies, over which he presided with great authority, called for his wisdom and perspicacity. But each day passed with great regularity. Joffre lived in an unpretentious villa near his Headquarters, which changed according to the exigencies of his work. After his breakfast, over which he wasted no time, he went afoot to his office, saluted on the way by soldiers and civilians. To the former he would say: "Bon jour, mon brave!" to the latter, he would vary the address to: "Bon jour, mon ami!" Children are attracted by him, and raise their caps or curtsy to gain a smile. Sometimes a little boy preceded him shouting, to Joffre's infinite amusement: "Vive notre Général!" Thus greeted as a symbol of united France, as the redeemer of the country, Joffre passed into his Headquarters and was soon plunged in the problem that absorbed him every hour. Whilst he slept that calm sleep of his, wires had flashed with news of victory or defeat or with the common incidents of the Front. "If it is good news, it will keep until the morning," said Joffre when recommending his officers to respect his rest; "if the news is bad, you know what to do; everything has been prepared." In this way he gained a full night's repose, whatever the happenings between the parallel lines of combatants, or in the savage thrust of midnight raids and assaults. And he slept on calmly keeping fresh his energies for the morrow.

And now, when he enters his office, his first duty is to call for the reports of the night. These he studies closely, and they are then classified according to the armies to which they belong, in cardboard

covers of different colours. Thereupon takes place the conference to which I have alluded; and then Joffre, having finished his morning's work at a time when most men are beginning it, goes out upon a long and solitary tramp through the countryside. He gives himself freely to his meditations, knowing that none of the inhabitants, whom he crosses on his path, will dare to disturb him. Either he thinks of a knotty question presented by some new move of the enemy, or his mind fashions one of those electrifying Orders of the Day which have become world-famous. "The time for looking back has ceased . . . die rather than yield ground." That order, given on the eve of the battle of the Marne, has become as celebrated as Nelson's signal. Like most men who keep their thoughts rigidly to themselves, his occasional utterances are full of a strange force. And Joffre's Orders of the Day have reached a high order of eloquence and exalted passion.

The events of the day may call Joffre to the Front, whither he goes in a fast motor-car. On the way he will lunch at a village *auberge* and scandalises the proprietor, who has prepared, perhaps, a royal feast—if he knew in advance the honour to be done him—by the plainness of his fare. A simple omelette, a little fruit and cheese for a Generalissimo! Boniface is *bouleversé*! It is incredible! With pious industry a journalist compiled Joffre's menus during the battle of the Marne. They were the simple meals of any bourgeois; a plate of roast meat, preceded by soup or *hors d'œuvre* and followed by vegetables and fruit, constituted the repast. Notwithstanding this sobriety, the General does not disdain the pleasures of the table; like every good Southerner, he is

something of a *gourmet*, but on campaign he exercises a rigid self-restraint.

The same disregard for personal discomfort pervades all his arrangements. When the battle of the Marne raged, the proprietor of a château at Barle-Due, whence Joffre directed operations, placed his house at the Commander-in-Chief's disposal. Joffre gave the finest rooms of the house, overlooking a calm and beautiful garden, to the officers of his suite; he himself, took a front room facing the Boulevard, and subject, of course, to the street noises; he thinks nothing of these things. His dinner at eight o'clock, after the day's work—for he resumes touch with the details of Headquarters towards the end of the afternoon—is just as simple as the lunch, and Joffre never varies from this strict *régime*. Thanks to its regularity, he is able to sustain, without physical change or faltering, the heavy burden of his rôle.

Joffre belongs to the African school of soldier, against whom is reproached an impetuous bravery without science or system, and only possible against an enemy untrained, ill-equipped, and ignorant of tactics. It was thought that men were unfitted to fight against a civilised enemy after their contact with the rude warriors of the desert and jungle; but by a curious coincidence, Joffre, Galliéni, Marchand, Gouraud, and Bailloud (Sarrail's lieutenant in his retreat through Macedonia), all learned their business of soldiering in the waste places of the earth, in overcoming the obstacles of rebellious Nature or the treachery of tribes. But Joffre has shown, as others have shown, that this contact with difficulties brings out the man and educates, strengthens, and vitalises him. Often the faults of others have been placed on the

broad back of the Generalissimo. He has been accused of ignoring the German intentions to invade France through Belgium. What was his Intelligence Department doing that they did not know? But Joffre and his staff were well aware of the plan, and they knew also the different stages of the march. But what they had not reckoned upon was the rapid fall of the forts of Liège and Namur before the heavy guns of the invaders. That the Germans possessed siege artillery was a matter of common knowledge in France; but alas! to meet it was involved a large expenditure which Parliament would not sanction. That is the reason of it. "Cherchez la politique" is the answer to the shortage in heavy ordnance and in armoured aeroplanes.

It would take too long to tabulate the various attempts to extort money from Deputies for the national defence. But though the attenuated credits cannot be laid to the charge of the General Staff, it is true that experts were divided on the use that could be made of the heavy siege-pieces which the Germans thrust into battle. Such cumbersome weapons would prove white elephants said some in authority, and protested that they could not "hold" the infantry. However that may be, Joffre was faced with the difficulty that the Germans, instead of entering France by the eastern gate, where forts and "cover" combined to make the task supremely difficult, chose the easier road by Belgium and through the Luxembourg. Yet it was obviously impossible to tell by which route the enemy would enter. Joffre was forced to watch them all, to secure contact at each point, to feel the enemy, and then retreat towards his reserves. This, indeed, was the plan more or less successfully carried out. But the fact that

Belgium was the main path of the invasion caused a rapid transposition of forces at the last moment, for the bulk of the army had to swing from the east to the north, and the process took time. Here, again, the Germans were at an advantage, for they had systematically built railways to the edge of the Luxembourg and in Alsace-Lorraine, so that their mobilisation was startlingly rapid.

Joffre was certainly unprepared for the speed with which the enemy brought into play his reserves. This was due to the cunning use which he made of his strategic railways, but also to a perfidious advance in the date of mobilisation. The army was already on a war footing when France had begun her work of assembling troops. And so Joffre was handicapped by many things, by lack of rapid railway transit, of heavy cannon and of the minute preparation and prevision which extended to the years preceding his appointment. Germany had prepared for war whilst France was thinking of peace and dreaming of progress in art and letters and general culture, anticipating a universal brotherhood, pathetically chimerical in the face of the armaments across the Rhine. Politics were greatly responsible for the inferiority of France in the opening weeks of the war. The troops assembled on the Franco-Belgian frontier had not at once the value of the invading force. They were wanting in numbers, in the perfection of their equipment and in the intensity of their training. Though Joffre had justly condemned incompetence in high places, it is also true that France was over-weighted by the masses of a highly trained enemy which placed all its reliance upon the strength and rapidity of the first blow.

The Socialist doctrine would have substituted popular *élan* and the fierce revolutionary spirit for what it held to be the sterile stupidity of a long and intensive military preparation. And again, the Socialist movement in Germany proved a snare and delusion to many of the faith in France. Was it possible that war could come when millions of the masses in each nation were vowed to peace? The nation was deceived—perhaps it wanted to be deceived. In any case, it was much more interesting to concentrate upon human progress, to let the mind dwell upon the delightful prospect of the millennium, when there will be no more war, and when an era of peace and tranquillity and of mutual co-operation will have been ushered in, than to linger upon a picture of militarism bound up with cannon and its human food.

The French General Staff apparently thought that the German attack would come from the two frontiers and would seek to envelop the French Army in its tentacles, and thus conclude with one swift, tremendous blow a campaign more disastrous than that of 1870. It seems clear, also, that M. Barthou's success in carrying the Three-Years Law was an important factor in the resolution of Germany to invade France by Belgium rather than by the East. The new legislation had given great strength to the "cover," and thus there was little chance of passing that way. Probably had Germany attacked France by the East, England would never have been brought in and her rôle would have been confined to protecting the French coasts by her fleet. Thus, M. Barthou might properly contend that the mere fact that the Three-Years Law was voted determined the action of Germany and enlisted the support of England.

We have shown that Joffre by his system of making war and his qualities of heart and head is the ideal democratic chief. Obviously, there is little of the Napoleonic temper in his strategy, which is made up of prudent vigour and discernment rather than of brilliancy or spontaneity. Some urge that Joffre should have made his stand upon the Aisne rather than upon the Marne, since the latter line was better defended by Nature, but his reserves were not sufficiently accessible. In any case, conditions have altered since Napoleon's day, and even the Corsican's great faculty of improvisation scarcely would have found scope in twentieth-century conditions. None the less, Joffre's dispositions at the battle of the Marne, when he drew the enemy to his own battle-ground and supported his line at each end with the forts of Paris and of the East were strictly in the style of the Master. And by his very victory he proved the martial qualities of the French, since with the aid of the English they administered a sharp repulse to an enemy flushed with success and organised and equipped in a manner superior to the Home forces. Until the story is disproved, I shall continue to think that the battle of the Marne would have been definitive and the enemy driven from the soil of France had Joffre possessed an adequate supply of munitions.

We have taken the Generalissimo to the edge of the great battle: let us now give a few particulars of his chief collaborator.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE SECOND IN COMMAND

IF ever Nancy is minded to raise a statue in its beautiful Place Stanislas to a battle-hero it will be surely to Noel-Marie Edouard Curières de Castelnau, for to him is due the existence of the city. During three tremendous weeks its fate hung in the balance—weeks in which Joffre was developing the final phases of his retreat and then delivering battle on the Marne. With flank and rear defended from the immense army that de Castelnau and Dubail prevented from passing the gap of Nancy, the master strategist was enabled to win. Nancy lies in the plain; it can be never defended, people said, and, therefore, it was to be left an open town. Did not the Treaty of Frankfort forbid the placing of cannon which would command German soil? Be that as it may, the doubters had forgotten le Grand Couronné, a series of wooded heights and steep plateaux, which marked the junction of Meurthe with Moselle and interposed a rugged barrier between the old Lorraine capital and the frontier. Here, with a forethought unusual in a country where so little had been prepared, trenches had been dug; and when de Castelnau was forced to retreat from the annexed province before an impassable barrier of artillery, he raised earthworks, installed barbed wire entanglements and brought heavy guns

from Toul. It was the turn of the Germans to be surprised. With three attenuated army corps and four or five divisions of reserve, de Castelnau kept at bay an immense force of the enemy which battered savagely at the gates.

How gaily the army marched out to the reconquest of annexed Lorraine and to occupy the Germans whilst the English landed in Belgium. It was a force thoroughly representative of France, for it was recruited from all parts. There were reservists from Bordeaux, from Marseilles, from Montpellier and from the West, but the heart of the crusade was the famous 20th Army Corps from Nancy—Lorrainers to a man—who had inherited the memory of the *année terrible*. With a gesture that expressed eloquently their spirit, they knocked over the frontier posts as they sang the *Marseillaise* with the strenuous accent of the soldier engaging in a holy war. Great was their first enthusiasm, but great, also, their disappointment, for none met them in the streets; no hand flung flowers to them; no voice cried in gladness: "Vive l'Armée! Vive la France!" The silence was sinister, scarcely broken by the dull reverberation of distant cannon bombarding Pont-à-Mousson. It took them a little time to realise that the masters of the soil, fearing a demonstration, had threatened the inhabitants with its consequences. The silence and the gloom were fully explained.

For two days the army marched into the old land of France without meeting serious opposition. Then the presence of strong outposts betokened the enemy. Dubail's army operating to the south strove to enter more deeply into German territory through Sarreburg; de Castelnau took the northern route through Delme

and Morhange. Both were met by a tremendous opposition. The battle line stretched in rough crescent form through the three places I have named, Dubail's left wing being in contact with de Castelnau's right. The Germans had secretly organised a vast system of defence in which gun positions were established and distances marked. The trenches existed for miles and had been furnished with innumerable machine-guns and heavy mortars, the possession of which was now revealed for the first time. The battle was joined, therefore, in disadvantageous conditions for the French. Every ruse known in warfare was employed by the foe. It decked the trenches with dummies and led on the assailants to their doom, for mitrailleuses were posted behind the lay figures. Regiments lost more than half their effectives. An early victim was Lieutenant Xavier de Castelnau, one of the General's sons, who fell whilst leading his men of the 4th Battalion of Chasseurs to a counter-attack. He was mentioned for gallantry in the Orders of the Day.

The French soon discovered that the forces opposing them were no mere "cover" troops, but the Bavarian Army under its Crown Prince, an army under Von Heeringen and a strong detachment from Von Deimling's command. Forced to retreat, de Castelnau fell back ten miles to the Grand Couronné, which he fortified in the way I have described. Dubail, who had begun well with successes in the Vosges, was unable to maintain his position on the Sarre and fell back, also. His troops, especially the 21st Corps, behaved with great gallantry and only left Sarreburg under express orders, and then with colours flying and the band playing the *Marche Lorraine*. Though

he delivered many attacks upon the enemy, he was forced to reform behind the Meurthe, and finally took up a position at Lunéville and in the fork between the stream just mentioned and the Mortaigne.

The attack on the Grand Couronné was particularly severe. Wave after wave of the enemy threw itself against the works held by de Castelnau's troops, who, though exhausted by a week's continuous marching and fighting, showed an unbreakable spirit. And there were brought to the attack, besides the armies I have mentioned, four new Corps composed of seventeen brigades of Ersatz, so that the hostile forces numbered nearly half-a-million men. The assailants were encouraged not merely by their numerical superiority—Dubail's army was about 150,000—but by their success in Lorraine, which had been hailed by their countrymen as a great victory. Furthermore, they were under the eye of the Emperor and a brilliant staff, who were watching them from the hill of Eply, to the north of the Couronné. The Kaiser's dramatic sense had been awakened by the thought of a triumphal entry into Nancy, the ancient capital of Lorraine. He realised what it would mean in the Fatherland, and that, from a military point, it would signify that a breach had been made in the defences of France. Alas, for human hopes! The walls of Jericho refused to fall to the trumpet's brazen call; and the Kaiser, after waiting in vain for a victory, departed sombre and silent for other fields.

The Germans tried every imaginable means to break through, and bloody were the struggles on hill-tops and in the woods of the region. A regiment, suddenly debouching from a forest, was mown down within a

few yards of the French trenches, and a division, marching to the attack with drums and fifes playing, met with a similar fate. The Forest of Vitremont, near Lunéville, was filled with the bodies of Germans, computed to number 4500. Vigorous counter-attacks by de Castelnau from north to south, and by Dubail from west to east, finally held the enemy in check, and this uneasy equilibrium lasted for a fortnight—the tremendous fortnight in which Joffre saved Paris and sent the Germans flying to the north. At that moment, the eastern frontier from Nancy to the Vosges was free of the enemy; but at what a cost! Thousands had been lost on either side and villages had been burned and civilians assassinated by the Germans in pursuance of their studied policy of terrorisation.

De Castelnau's brilliant tactics brought him renown and the direction of the 2nd Army on the Compiègne-Arras line. Along this Front rising rectangularly from the Aisne to the north, occurred those terrific battles, which marked the historic "race to the sea." Smarting from their defeat on the Marne, the Germans sought to turn the Allies' left; Joffre had a similar idea in wishing to envelop the enemy's right. The resultant contest was the *course à la mer*. But the forces given to de Castelnau were inadequate for the purpose, and de Maud'huy's army was added to the line now creeping forward like a gigantic snake to the sea. But before the Germans tried to pierce at Lens and Arras, they assailed the lower line held by de Castelnau, and the angle formed by Aisne and Oise proved a particularly warm corner. In that late September and early October, de Castelnau lost as many men as in Lorraine, and the battles, if less

renowned, were as fiercely fought as those to the north of Arras on the Yser and at Ypres.

The Germans in extending their lines realised that if they could reach Dunkirk and Calais they would not only cut England's communications, but point a pistol at her heart. And so they brought up army after army until the line stretched in a solid trunk of trenches with branches towards the sea, and 800,000 Germans (eighteen Army Corps and four Cavalry Corps) made persistent efforts to break through the Allies or envelop them. To defeat this plan, Joffre formed three new armies, of which de Castelnau's was one, and brought up the English from the Aisne, and the Belgians from Antwerp. The situation was often critical, for de Castelnau, like the other commanders, lacked ammunition. But his gift of prevision and his infinite resource saved the day. Eventually, the chief fighting was transferred to the northern part of the line, but de Castelnau's early resistance had rendered the greatest service. And so Joffre thought, for de Castelnau was given dominion over four armies from Soissons to Verdun, the longest front in the possession of a single commander, though Foch and Dubail were also given groups of armies. His tenure of the line was distinguished for the great offensive in Champagne, whereby 23,000 prisoners and 120 guns were captured by the French, and 3,000 prisoners and 25 guns by the English in Artois. That latter feat will be ever remembered for the house-to-house fighting in Loos and for the brilliant capture of Hill 70.

The General's vigour of body is as remarkable as his vigour of mind. He seems never to tire. In the Great War he took no particular care of his health, going to bed late and rising early with apparent

impunity. Nor did he follow any system of diet, eating heartily with a Southerner's appreciation of a good table. An excellent horseman, the Great War left him little time for equestrian exercise. When commanding on the Somme he had horses at headquarters at Amiens, but he rode only once in seven or eight months. Like his chief he walked a good deal, not merely for exercise, but to get into direct touch with the troops. He believes in the closest relations between the leader and the led. He likes to recall the names and records of his officers and to ascertain the thoughts and sentiments of the men. His inspections behind the lines were no perfunctory affairs, but real examinations into moral and *matériel*. No detail of the kits escaped him, and he questioned soldiers as if searching consciences. Officers in his command have told me that his parades lasted a couple of hours or more. He never lost an opportunity of becoming acquainted with the elements of his armies. As he journeyed to the Front he would spring from his car to compliment a colonel on the appearance of his regiment, or turn aside to visit a hospital and comfort the inmates with cheery words. He is a believer in moral suasion and the uplift of words. Men going into battle look to him for encouragement, and never in vain. Officers in charge of them interrogate his personal staff: "What does the General say? Does he think we can win?" And upon the answer, which is certain to be positive and stimulating, depends their demeanour in the fight. There is something in the look of this soldier of the old school, courteous and chivalrous, with character, resolution, and intelligence, written in the high-coloured features, framed by the white hair that bespeak courage,

health and confidence, and instil in others the bravery and sacrifice that are dominant in himself. This influence is heightened by the knowledge that he has himself suffered in his intimate affections. When the death of Gerald, his second son, occurred on the Marne—he was buried at Vitry-le-François—de Castelnau was engaged in a Council of War on the Eastern Front. The news was brought to him as he deliberated with his commanders on the plan of battle. After a painful moment he said with stoic calm, "Gentlemen, let us continue." And he bore with equal fortitude the news that another son had been wounded and taken prisoner at Arras.

Such calmness and composure spring from the deep conviction that all is for the best. Doubtless, there was something of predestination in the fact that he was baptized Noel-Marie, in allusion to the date of his birth, Christmas Eve. To his Catholic parents it was a sign and a symbol. His early training at a Jesuit College, before he entered St. Cyr, confirmed him in his principles, and he is of those who have practised always their faith. He attends Mass every day, and when going to the Front at night he arouses a priest to take the Sacrament. He was the first to insist upon the attendance of chaplains with the forces. To his credit he has never concealed his faith, though there were times in the history of the Third Republic when it might have been politic to do so. Perhaps this sturdiness in his profession accounts for the slowness of his promotion. It began, however, with a rush—Captain at nineteen, in charge of a company in the Loire Army under General Davout, a grandson of Napoleon's famous Marshal; but he stayed long years working steadily but inconspicu-

ously on the staff. The tide turned rapidly when he again commanded troops, and his quality was seen at once. For six years he was Colonel of the 37th Regiment of Infantry at Nancy (Turenne's old command), and here he obtained that deep knowledge of the country which stood him in such stead ten years later. He did not get his General's stars until 1906, and then commanded troops at Soissons, Sedan, and Chambrun. He distinguished himself in grand manœuvres in the Bourbonnais, under the eye of General Tremeau, president of the War Council and the designated Commander-in-Chief under the old system. The new system, inaugurated by Joffre, brought him into close contact with the Generalissimo, whose Chief-of-Staff he became and collaborator in framing the Three-Years Law, then being passed by the Legislature. The same year he went to England to attend the Manœuvres and afterwards conferred with the military chiefs; and a mission took him to Russia, where he discussed the lines of eventual co-operation.

Of an old Southern family, the General was born (in 1851) at St. Affrique in the Aveyron, the old Rouergue which came to the French Crown under Henri IV. He likes to speak the *patois* with soldiers from the district, but he is not democratic in the French sense of the word, though familiar in his dealings with the ranks and solicitous for their welfare. But he is exacting where discipline is concerned, and not only gives orders but sees that they are executed. His staff as well as his regimental officers respect his strenuous temper. His family is noted for intellectual distinction. Some of his brothers, as well as his sons, were at the Polytechnique, the famous mathematical school. He, himself, is both classical and mathe-

matical. If he has little English and less German, and his pronunciation of English place-names amuses his Anglo-Saxon friends, he is a brilliant classic, and jokes in Latin, when the mood takes, with his staff. Nevertheless he is thoroughly modern in his appreciation of science and gives a chance to any likely inventor. Manufacturers are numbered amongst his family, and the largest coal-mine in the south belongs to it. His father, however, was a jurist and a friend of the economist, Le Play.

The General's vigour comes from the natural energy of his mind. In his boyhood there were few sports in France, but he likes to tell his intimates that he played a sort of football, with an inflated ball, in his *lycée* in the mountains. His youngest son is a well-known champion of the Rugby game. Of his six sons, each went to the war. Three were already in the Army, one was at school, another in the Navy, and a third an engineer. The record is a tribute to the patriotism—no uncommon trait—of provincial France. And there are those who, ignorant of the austerity of her Catholic families, declared that France was decadent! Of the General's six daughters—for Providence has blessed him with a full quiver—one has had her arm amputated, having been infected with gangrene whilst nursing in a hospital. Such courage and devotion are well exemplified in the mother, who heard of her son's death whilst attending the little church where it is her habit to go daily. "Which one?" she asked, almost inaudibly of the *curé*, as she saw by his look of tenderness, that he had bad news to communicate. She thought of her husband, and of her sons at the Front, and when the name was pronounced, with a soft sigh of resignation she bowed

her silvery head a little lower over the breviary, and proceeded with outward tranquillity, though with a torn heart, to receive the consolation of her religion.

The man whom I have summarily sketched was invested by Joffre with the dignity of his Chief-of-Staff and the title of Major-General. The life-long friend became the chief aid in his deliberations, and the virtual leader on the Western Front, leaving to the highest in command the larger issues of a world-wide campaign. Even in Republican France there is thus place for the *croyant* and the aristocrat, as the names of Delangle de Cary, de Maud'huy, and D'Urbal show.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ORGANISATION OF MUNITIONS

ONE of the many surprises of the war was the vast place given to munitions. Not even the most careful calculator had foreseen the enormous consumption of war *matériel* that would result from a long continuance of trench warfare. The Germans had reckoned on an expenditure of 35,000 shells a day, and the French on about half that; the actual consumption was often 100,000 shells on each side.

Both French and German had based their figures on a rapid war, and, had the invaders' plans been realised, Paris would have been occupied and the French opposition paralysed in a fortnight. But this was reckoning without Joffre, without England, and without "General Chance," one of the most important factors in any war. Ammunition, by reason of its vast rôle, became as engrossing and as vitally important as the actual fighting. For it soon became apparent that in this war of *matériel* he would win who could most quickly assemble the largest quantity of guns and shot and shell. The Germans began with an immense advantage, for they had accumulated secretly a mass of machine-guns estimated at 50,000, leaving the Allies hopelessly in the rear in this respect. But even their perverse intelligence did not fully grasp the logical outcome of their own preparations,

or foresee that, their first plan having failed, they would be caught inevitably in their own toils.

To the eternal credit of the French, they realised with great rapidity the character of the war, and set themselves with methodical speed to adapt themselves to its unexpected features. Factories sprang up all over the country, some created out of boards and bricks; others existing, but "controlled" in the English sense, with Army officers assisting the civilian directors; and a vast business of production was ordered and marshalled as if the French had never done anything else in their lives. At one bound, they developed into a manufacturing nation, though the term would have been refused them, in the long yesterday of the war, by England, the United States, and Germany. Their faculty for seeing clearly and acting quickly, so apparent in their history, again came to their aid. It was their distinguishing mark during the Great Revolution. Having seized the essentials of the problem, they acted upon their insight with startling rapidity and resolution. Of course they committed excesses of a dreadful kind, but their excuse was the gigantic character of the evil which they sought to remedy. Much the same spirit of swift determination, happily without its fearful manifestations, came upon the French people, and with all the old Republican ardour they set themselves, with a sort of grim alacrity, to face the crisis. The old stern common sense, which has always lain at the bottom of apparent volatility, again came to their rescue; and in no way did the French show a greater grasp of the situation than in their handling of munitions.

It had been supposed that they were wanting in

order and method, and that their dramatic achievements were due to the impulse of the moment. But, even if this were ever wholly true, it was certainly not true of the second great struggle with Germany. The magnificent effort of France was the outcome, not of improvisation, but of the will to conquer and to adopt the proper means to secure that end. Nor was a Press campaign necessary, as in England, to bring home to the people the peculiar importance of war-work in the factories. It is true that M. Albert Thomas, who took charge of Munitions in the circumstances which I shall describe, made speeches to factory workers in his visits of inspection, but it was never necessary to wrestle with labour and cause it to abrogate its proud pretensions, months after the war had broken out. Conscription would have settled that question even if a vivid sense of realities had not rendered unnecessary any exhortation from Ministerial lips. The vital character of the war had penetrated to every intelligence; it had not stopped half-way through the social strata, as appeared to be the case in England. And the disposition of the working man in England towards conscription was only intelligible on the assumption that he did not understand. In France, the war was too deadly real, too close at hand for any to affect an attitude of light-hearted detachment.

The fact that men in the factories, like those on the railways, were mobilised, simplified matters a great deal. A man could not desist from his labour on the pretext of claiming higher pay without running the risk of being treated as a deserter—a thing unthinkable in time of war. His duty, then, was the soldier's—to remain where he was until relieved by

order. "We have had no strike since the war began." How well I recall the pride with which those words were uttered by a functionary at the Ministry of Munitions. If it spoke well for the patriotism of the working-class, it spoke equally well for conscription as a scientific basis for waging war. For it had cast its net over the whole nation, and by its means the munitions worker took his place in the factory as did the combatant in the trench. But there were certain complications which arose, none the less, in practice. If there was no disturbance of the labour market to exercise the conciliatory powers of the Minister, production did not yet reach its maximum until long after the war had broken out. This was due to the unexampled demand made on munitions and to the logical completeness of conscription. It required many months to adjust a plan whereby the skilled worker was placed in his rightful position in the factory, whilst those who had wrongly usurped his name and functions were sent to the trenches. The most unlikely people had described themselves as mechanics; and one found lawyers, sculptors, school-teachers, painters, writers and a host of semi-professional people masquerading as munition-workers. On the other hand, numbers of highly trained specialists, some distinguished chemists and engineers, had to be extricated from the trenches to take up their natural positions in the factories, in the interests of national defence. This *chassé-croissé*, inevitable in such a country as France, where Government must be based upon equality, took some time to effect. Indeed, the chief duty of the publicist during the second year of the war seemed to be to urge an equitable and intelligent application of the

Dalbicz law, which was aimed expressly at the shirker.

Nor did private patronage and political "pull" wholly disappear, even in the stringent atmosphere of a national crisis. This was, perhaps, to expect too much of human nature. And so the Minister of Munitions constantly received recommendations for factory employment from persons whose intervention it was hard to resist. On the one hand, the Minister was asked by important deputies to bring back this or that worker from the Front; on the other, he was warned by groups of Republican zealots of the danger to democracy of showing partiality and conniving at the existence of the shirker. In a laudable effort to strike the happy medium, M. Thomas decided to receive no more nominations to the factory, and decreed that only the indispensable man was to be kept in the rear. Even the good workman, if of military age, must become a combatant; his place in the factory would be taken by an older man. But there remained, naturally, a certain rivalry between the trench and the workshop, not unconnected with the fact that assiduous munition-workers also received their *Croix de Guerre*—a decoration that, assuredly, should have been reserved for deeds of gallantry on the battle-field. But these various difficulties, which M. Thomas settled with habitual celerity and *savoir faire*, were, after all, only questions of detail, and in no way affected the broad principle of conscription or the working of the new Act against the *embusqués*. There was no quarrel with compulsion, for each worker recognised the right of the nation to ask him to suspend his individual rights at such a moment. "We are at war; the vital interests of

the country are at stake." This was a sufficient argument. And so all energies were directed to increasing the output. In connection with the establishment of factories, the "white coal" or water-falls of the mountains were harnessed to the work, and engineer shops were set up under the falls themselves to employ the power directly. Inventors were given *carte blanche* to work out their ideas and valuable improvements resulted in the opportunity given to scientific brains to simplify processes, and thus effect economies in manufacture. For the first time France had begun to explore and develop her own scientific estate, which she had left, hitherto, largely to the Germans. For, if the latter were foremost in chemistry, they had learned not a little from the researches of Berthelot and Pasteur. The great bacteriologist's study of ferments contributed sensibly to the growth of the German brewing industry. Under the direction of scientific soldiers and officials, production rose to immense heights, and it soon reached more than 100,000 shells a day, at a time when, according to Mr. Lloyd George, the English output was scarcely more than 15,000 a day. M. Charles Humbert, Senator for the Meuse and editor of the *Journal*, preached in his columns the need of more guns and shells, and his gospel was enforced by other writers; but the root argument laid in the comprehension of the people themselves and in their instinctive realisation of what there was to be done and how to do it. Latin brains and Latin culture triumphed in an absolutely new field.

The genius of Munitions was M. Albert Thomas, who sprang into prominence from the unlikely beginnings of a schoolmaster and parliamentarian with

Socialistic leanings. His assets were youth and vigour and a large stock of learning. He had graduated from the "Higher Normal School," the training ground for secondary teachers, with an *agrégation* in history—equivalent to a Fellowship Examination in England—and then became tutor to a grandson of Victor Hugo. In the family were steelworks situated in the Loire, and the tutor's active mind became interested in the fascinating processes which turned the unwrought metal into shining implements of labour. This knowledge, strengthened by many visits, stood him in good stead when he became a deputy, and thereafter Reporter to the State Railways Committee. His constituency was Sceaux, on the outskirts of the capital, and therein was his native commune, Champigny, where he was born of humble shopkeepers and continued to reside. In the Chamber his connection with the railways brought him into contact with M. Claveille, then coming into fame as administrator of the Ouest-Etat line. M. Thomas must be impressed by the catenation of events, for, on arriving at the Ministry of Munitions, he bethought him of the railway manager and installed him first as his master of contracts and, then, at the head of manufacture. So that the guns began to arrive at their appointed place with the same punctuality with which the trains on the State Railway, under the reforming zeal of M. Claveille, began to steam into the Gare St. Lazare.

At the outbreak of the war, M. Thomas, torn from peaceful Socialistic propaganda in *L'Humanité*, where he supported M. Jean Jaurès in his opposition to Three-Years, went to the Front as a lieutenant of reserve. After a few weeks in the trenches, he

joined his General's Staff and then was summoned to Bordeaux, whither the Government had retired from threatened Paris. "Will you organise Munitions?" he was asked. The battle of the Marne had revealed not only their primordial necessity, but the grievous shortage of France, and it was said that had she been better provided, the Germans would have had no chance of re-establishing themselves on the line of the Aisne. So M. Thomas, faced with the crude need of the hour, undertook the post and flung himself into it with his accustomed energy. His acquaintance with steel, both in the works he had studied and the railway he had controlled, fortified his resolution to undertake the responsibility. Day and night he passed rapidly, from point to point, in his motor-car, organising munition work and exhorting and advising the engineers of the country engaged in it, until, gradually, the production was screwed up to a point where, with the shells made in England, it equalled the output of the German factories. Here was a strange destiny for a man whose reading and reflection had induced him to believe that the tide of humanity was set towards universal brotherhood. Looking as little like a professor of war as could be possibly imagined—a little plethoric, a little heavy in face and figure, and glancing out upon the world through kindly spectacles—this new embodiment of Mars accepted his position with a frank and systematised zeal that led directly to success. In a short time, the tree brought forth prodigious fruit. He worked ceaselessly, turning Sundays into days of labour; his only relaxation from exhausting office was to undertake further journeys of inspection.

There was advantage in the fact that he was a man of wide general views and not an expert. Had he been a gunner, he would have thought exclusively of the pointing of his piece; as an engineer he would have reflected on the life-history of the gun from its early inception to its appearance as a finished article of destruction. But being the intelligent amateur, he was able, like an airman, to soar over intercepted space, and think of the problem in its wider aspects: how to obtain the ore and transport it from the other ends of the earth; how to procure the quickest output from the arsenals; how to adjust factory labour to the new law against the shirker; how to provide a sufficiency of food for the monsters he was evolving; how to cultivate the scientific *terrain* of the war; and finally, how he could deliver his deadly wares into the hands of those who would use them against the enemy. There were a hundred different problems arising out of the great military post which the war had given him, and he managed them all with the ease and optimism that belong to rapid assimilation combined with poise, with *sang-froid*, and decision of character. All these virtues contributed to the success of M. Thomas. He was rewarded by official appointment to the post of Under Secretary of State for Munitions, specially created for him by M. Millerand, the then Minister of War. The honour was unique in the history of the Third Republic, which does not always advantage those who serve it best.

All the departments connected with guns had to be concentrated at the Ministry of Munitions in the Champs Elysées. At the outbreak of war the building was a cosmopolitan hotel on the verge of opening;

the Government, needing quarters for its new department of State, acquired it, and there amidst Louis XVI chairs and Empire cabinets were installed M. Thomas and his coadjutors. The Socialist pacifist had become the Grand Armourer of France, the licensed provider of artillery, in a house of luxury built for the wealthy classes. . . . In his chain of duties, however, was a broken link. He was not given charge of the powder, though it was essential to his full usefulness; and officials in that department corresponded directly with the Minister of War. But Galliéni, when he came to the Rue St. Dominique, saw the faults of the system and immediately invested his titular subordinate with the necessary powers. It was at this moment, when work was piling high upon his willing shoulders, that M. Thomas gave M. Claveille authority over the construction of the guns. And the railway manager's experience proved invaluable in his new post.

France had every reason to be proud of her organisation of Munitions, and for the spirit which the crisis prompted amongst her functionaries and workers. As a University man of distinction, M. Thomas placed his faith in higher education and was surrounded by men who had achieved distinction in science and letters. A Sorbonne professor of Romance languages, M. Roques, acted as his chief secretary; and a scholar of European reputation occupied unremunerated leisure in conducting the correspondence of the Department. Thus the Ministry provided another example of public spirit in France and of Gallic accessibility to new ideas.

Quite apart from the attitude of labour, admirably

attuned to the circumstances, there arose the material difficulty of finding men. The *Loi Dalbiez* was rigorous in its application, and there was a dearth of young and vigorous men, both skilled and unskilled, in the factories. I have spoken of some of the methods adopted by M. Thomas to meet the case : now he went to the colonies and employed Arabs and Kabyles, Annamites, and other friendly nationals from France overseas. This exotic labour worked harmoniously with the dominant race. Wages were on a far less generous scale than in England, and no worker, however skilled, obtained £8 a week or even half that amount. Such prices were unthought of. The common wage for unskilled labour was five francs for a ten-hour day for men and women. Where the operations were perfectly simple and required only adroitness, the wages for female labour were sometimes only 3 frs. a day. Even the trained mechanic earned no more than 15 frs., the highest price being generally 13 frs. 50. Thus, you see, there was a vast difference between the English and the French positions, and it is clear that the cost to the country of shell production was infinitely less in France, even at a moment when the output was infinitely greater. There were no lady workers in the factories—"heureusement non"—said the official, with an expressive shrug, when I asked the question, and the whole scheme of production was worked on carefully considered, economical, and patriotic lines. Certainly, the worker made very little profit out of his labour, and the intensity of it in France, as in England, put a considerable strain upon his health.

A veritable scientific mobilisation was necessary

in the Champs Elysées. Highly trained brains were needed for the delicate calculations essential to the manufacture of explosives and to the creation of new types of guns. It meant the installation of eminent specialists at the Ministry and the carrying out of elaborate experiments in laboratories and open-air trial grounds. The syndicates, I repeat, made no difficulty for the Minister by adherence to rules framed for peace; but, of course, the power of these bodies in France over their fellow-workers is less pronounced than across the Straits. But, though it has its stringent rules, it raised no finger of protest against the speeding-up of production, the continuous shifts, the employment of women and children and of coloured labour. The difficulty that existed was entirely due to the fear of creating any suspicion of favouritism amongst those who were fighting the country's battles by any arbitrary selection of men for employment in the factories. None the less, the munitions worker had to be recruited on a large scale, for the consumption of shot and shell exceeded all belief and emphasised the fantastic character of the conflict.

No doubt the physical existence of the Channel was answerable for the difference in attitude of French and English labour. It was difficult for our workers to visualise the situation in France with its invaded departments, its devastated villages, its ruined industries, its strangulated commerce and those other disabilities which weigh upon a nation that has suffered defilement from the foe. But the French soon came to see that the loyalty of the British working man was not in question because of his

reluctance to accept a system which, however, both Abraham Lincoln and Cromwell found necessary in the raising of armed forces for the carrying out of national purposes. And yet neither could be accused of being indifferent to the claims of democracy.

## CHAPTER IX

### FRENCH DISCIPLINE AND LEADERSHIP

A CERTAIN number of political students had come to the discouraging conclusion that discipline could not exist side by side with a pure democracy. The two things, they said, were incompatible. Trade Union leaders in England were for a long time apparently under the same illusion. Joffre, whom I have tried to show as the perfect democrat, will not accept any such view. In a frank and engaging mood of communicability, he explained to an American writer, Mr. Owen Johnson, who visited him at Headquarters, that democracy was by no means the uneasy bedfellow of discipline; the two could exist in the most perfect harmony. "Where a nation is truly Republican, I do not think there is any danger to the spirit of democracy in military preparation," said Joffre, in reply to the suggestions that the existence of a large army was a constant incitement to war, and opposed, therefore, to those pacific principles upon which a modern republic must be founded. Military discipline does not undermine democracy: that is his argument. "In a republic where the need of individual liberty is always strong, military service gives the citizen a quality of self-discipline which he needs, perhaps, to respect the rights of others, as well as to act in

organised bodies." And then he added that if America—and the remark applies, of course, to England—dreaded military service, it was because the citizen had his eyes fixed on the German ideal rather than on the French. The distinction between the French Army and the German was a difference in the conception of the rôle of the soldier. The German system made a man into a machine. It was based on fear, and robbed him of his initiative. It explained the attack in close formation, the stupendous throwing away of life, and an officer class, a veritable Brahmin caste, that did not transmit orders directly, but through sergeants and corporals. The French spirit, on the other hand, implied fraternity. The officer was interested in the welfare of his men and regarded them as his children. Nothing was indifferent to him which affected them morally or materially. The German system was the revolver at the head, the French the word of encouragement, the smile, the *bonne camaraderie*.

General Joffre's distinction happily expresses the fundamental character of the two systems; it goes to the root of army psychology. The French method requires a knowledge of the temperament of the men; for, though you may drive the dull and high-spirited in much the same way, provided you are brutal enough, to lead successfully requires knowledge of mental characteristics and a certain power of appeal which elicits the best efforts in your men. French officers, therefore, have to be psychologists, understanding the character of those they lead and the subtle differences that divide the townsman from the peasant. They must vary indefinitely the address when they talk to one or the other. These two

broad classes are moved by different springs of action, and the commander has to find out the best way of firing the lethargic and attracting the fiery nature.

A French friend, who commanded a battalion of engineers, gave me some explanation of the methods he employed in dealing with a difficult class, the town-bred mechanic. His battalion was composed of men from provincial centres, with a sprinkling of skilled workmen from Paris. He played off one against the other. When the Parisian was inclined to show slackness or insubordination he remonstrated with him in a tone of raillery and mock commiseration. It was certainly regrettable that he could not attain to the same level of conduct or efficiency as those excellent fellows from the provinces, who, after all, had not enjoyed the same advantages. Rarely had he to speak twice to the same delinquent; the man's *amour propre* was aroused; from that moment, he commenced to mend his ways. To the provincial he said that he was surprised that a man of his energy and parts should allow himself to take second place to the Parisian. Then it was true that the countryman could not hold his own with workers from the capital? This, again, proved admirably adapted to the particular mentality of his hearer; his pride was piqued; he gave no more trouble. Thus, to command under the French system requires considerable adroitness and intelligence.

The secret, my friend said, of keeping order and discipline in a regiment without getting oneself disliked was to refrain from exerting more authority than was strictly necessary. One must not be always on the look-out for faults. Officers made a mistake in seeing everything at all times; there are

moments when, as Nelson found, the blind eye was convenient. A Frenchman is not naturally inclined towards discipline; the quicker his intelligence, the more likely he is to feel resentment at clumsy authority. The peasant, slower to think and to take offence, is more amenable. He gives up his will and individuality with greater readiness to the leader, and even courts direction. But in the veins of every Frenchman is some trace of the *frondeur* and revolutionary. His mind is impatient of restraint and leaps readily to conclusions and, sometimes, to tragic resolutions. Mere authority, as authority, chafes him; he dislikes it in the abstract. To render it acceptable, there must be an idea behind it. If you want to lead him, you must be prepared to undertake gladly the same risks as he, to go out and meet them with a gay insouciance. You must show him that you do not count your life more valuable than his, or shelter yourself behind your position. You must lead him by going in front, not by driving him from behind. It is an age of miracles; astounding things may happen; notwithstanding his nonchalance and objection to play the hero, at the moment of action he becomes transformed. You have only to know how to draw him out, to find the formula which unlocks his heart, to discover the hidden springs of his emotion. For an idea, it has been said, he is ever ready to shoulder a rifle behind a barricade. And when that idea is the country, with patriotism leaping high, his *frondeur* spirit is capable of all. Centuries have not dimmed its ardent inflammability, and each successive phase in history renews his high susceptibility, until one feels that the Great War, instead of ex-

hausting the fruitful soil of France, has enriched it with new virtues and a new potentiality. Rifles have spoken again from the barricades, but this time the nation is ranged on one side of it and the invader on the other. Patriotism and ideality flow perennially from the mountains of Latin youth, ready to be diverted to any holy cause.

The spirit is manifest even in the midst of the battle. At the critical moment, when officers have fallen in the hurricane of iron, a man emerges from the ranks to lead on his comrades to the attack. From his knapsack, the legendary bâton has slipped into his strong, tenacious hand. He has shown qualities of leadership in the supreme hour. General Sir Robert Baden-Powell recognised this genius of the race for instant adaptation when he visited the French Front and heard stories of improvisation; the native initiative of the soldier comes ever to his aid in the tightest corners, where German mechanism inevitably fails. Years ago, De Vigny, in a celebrated phrase, proclaimed the inherent power of a Frenchman to become a man of war. Time and again he has proved his martial qualities—a sheer instance of atavism. A sergeant leads a battalion into the jaws of death with such fire and courage that each man is electrified, loses his constitutional timidity and becomes a lion in the fight. Under this magic influence he is irresistible, like Cromwell's Ironsides, whom, strange to say, he physically resembles. The low steel bonnet crowns the same sort of ruddy visage and brown beard which marked the East Anglian in the seventeenth century. There is something of the Englishman in him, something of the Berserker employing his "irresistible fury"

in a national cause. His spirit of adventure has been translated into terms of patriotic achievement.

And the officers themselves know how to acquire rapidly the science of the trench. Many in the regular army fell in the early days of the war; the professional leader trained and set apart for the career scarcely existed any more. Then up sprang the officer of reserve, until then engaged in civilian pursuits; nine-tenths were in that condition. But, taught in the hard school of war, they developed into the most accomplished chiefs.

Though the French *pioupiou* is readily accessible to daring, and glories in a passionate achievement, he is not hypnotised by names, but demands a real aristocracy. It is an error to suppose that he resents superiority. On the contrary, he is constantly looking for it and is eager to recognise it when found. He is equally impressed by it, whether he finds it in the plain, plebeian features of Dupont or in the aristocratic mien of a De Rochefoucauld. The name matters nothing; the qualities are everything. But if he disregards family, he is insistent on a real distinction. Dupont must not shelter his mediocrity under democracy, or can the patrician hope to win devotion by a mere show of elegance. The accent is not of much account in the trenches; there, as elsewhere, must be a real superiority. If it is wanting, if the officer is mediocre and vulgar in his taste and habits, shows the same deficiencies and the same lack of control as the lower ranks, then his supremacy will be short-lived, whatever his grade. And it does happen that old soldiers, promoted from the ranks, sometimes fail to inspire the respect that should be theirs, because they cling to the old habits, the old

*laissez-aller*, and know not how to assume the new virtues that should go with the new position. For commissioned rank in the French as in the other armies of the world must mark a real ascendancy, moral, mental, and even physical, to be effective in the best sense. It is part of the panoply of power.

None the less, the adaptability of the nation is never better shown than in the speed with which the officer, newly risen from the ranks, for bravery and coolness on the field, puts on the whole armour of leadership. Yet his speech, probably, will remain homely, and he will adopt no airs which jar with his humble origin and native simplicity. Perhaps the least successful of these leaders are those who have longest served in some capacity, such as *adjudant* (a rank above sergeant), because they are rooted fast in their old associations and have not those natural qualities of authority which should be inseparable from commissioned rank. The essential is that a man shall show the temper of a chief, and for this reason the sportsman often proves more successful in handling his men than the more intellectual type of soldier, who is better able, no doubt, to perceive the purpose of a movement. Yet the rank and file will certainly expect high attainments from their ultimate leaders, and are intelligent enough to know that no amount of practical experience is a real substitute for sound military culture. Obviously, a knowledge of military history and of the principles of strategy are not required of the subaltern who leads an attack on a village; but it is equally true that only to the student are accessible those solutions of the past which are of such importance in understanding the present. The sportsman, then,

rather than the office soldier, inspires the affection of his men. The type is more often found, no doubt, amongst the aristocracy and the higher *bourgeoisie* than amongst the artisan class, for in France at least the last-named has rarely the chance of playing games and of acquiring dexterity in manly sports. Again, the men know that those who have risen from the ranks are harder to serve than the "gentleman" class, just as the works' foreman is a severer taskmaster than the employer; thus of all the officers the type that best succeeds in drawing out the qualities of his men is he who has had the broadest education and is the best example of finished manhood. The birth and social advantage are merely the make-weight, not the ground-work, for his command; the contrary is alien to the Republican instinct and would be resented. But if the men are touched with the feeling that Jack is as good as his master, they like that master to be a fine, upstanding fellow, recommending himself as much by his handsome physical appearance as by his urbanity and *savoir-faire*. If to this can be added a lively temperament, disdain of danger and an evident liking for bodily exercise, his dominion will be complete. But these things do not come from books, or are they handed down from generation to generation like a Roman nose or a Bourbon chin. And thus is exposed, no doubt, the weakness of the hereditary principle. Alas! man cannot transmit, like a letter in the post, his courage and adroitness to his descendants. Meeting cross currents by the way, the atavic message becomes hopelessly confused.

Yet the French system in its elasticity is admirably adapted to the genius of the race, for it gives free

play to improvisation. No account is taken of social status, but I have shown that social rank, coupled with mental and moral attributes, do aid a man even in Republican France. Valour is no respecter of persons—the poor man may be as brave as the most favoured of the gods. Thus there is ever in the breast of the soldier the splendid hope that to-morrow he may begin his ascent to the temple of Fame. Cases of promotion are so numerous that they have ceased to be exceptional, and represented, at least during the Great War, half the number of commissioned officers. The *garçon de bureau*, earning his five francs a day at the Hôtel de Ville, is a lieutenant of reserve. In time of war he rejoins his regiment and becomes a captain. He is mentioned for bravery and is rewarded by the red ribbon of the Legion. No one finds it strange that this young man, son of a roadmaker in municipal employ, should be on the high road to honours whilst his father works on the low road of obscurity.

And the man—an amiable functionary of the Ville de Paris—from whom I had this instance of Republican grandeur and simplicity recalled his own military service and the *adjudant* studying to be an officer, who on wet days instructed young conscripts in the elementary lessons of the great battles. He remembers particularly his description of Fontenoy and his vivid presentation of the forces in contact and the different dispositions of the generals, which ended in our undoing and the victory of the French. The lecturer had kept the rugged speech of his class, but his obvious enthusiasm and knowledge of his subject found a quick road to the hearts and comprehension of his young hearers. That simple, rough

fellow with a taste for study is a Brigadier-General to-day. The Great War gave him his chance to show his mettle. It is a common enough story in the French Army, particularly in the first eighteen months of the war, when the Great Retreat and several sharp offensives had inflicted immense loss on the corps of officers.

The material of the French Army, then, is pretty fine stuff, but it has to be treated with a delicate discrimination and with that peculiar French quality known as *doigté*. We have seen that town and country, side by side in the same unit, must be dealt with perspicaciously by the officer. Anything that looks like mere routine and a mere waste of time and energy is particularly obnoxious to the sharp fellow from the large centres of population. "A quoi bon tout ça?" he asks, with a scarcely concealed irritation. He is difficult to lead unless he comprehends the military utility of the order. Once his sympathetic intelligence has been gained, he puts his soul into the work. The peasant farmer, on the other hand, accepts everything with the stolid passivity of those who work upon the land. He does not suffer moral torture from the feeling that he is wasting his time. Is he not out in the open? And the food is good. His intelligence does not rebel against red tape, which is so distasteful to his lively contemporary from the town workshops. And so the commander has to show discretion in his manner of utilising the human material to his hand. The mechanic probably will prove an excellent scout and give a vivid account of the country through which he passes and the enemy whom he has sighted. His interest has been excited, and all his qualities of

resourcefulness and ready adaptability come to the surface. He feels that he is being worthily employed, and is happy in the knowledge that he has been of service to his superior. But put him to guard a haystack and he is much less happy. That is a peasant's job, he feels. And the peasant, indeed, is perfectly at home in front of the hay; his nostrils dilate with pleasure at the sweet scent of it; it makes him think of his own bit of grass growing there in Brittany on one of those shining slopes where the gorse flames.

As a general rule, mechanical drill is irksome to the Latin mind; it fetters his individuality. The idea of turning perpetually in a barrack square to attain perfection in movements in mass is by no means to his liking. He has never been attracted to it, nor to the cult of buttons and straps and military tailoring. He cares little for such things. On the march, he considers only the question of covering the ground in the quickest manner with the least expenditure of force. He is largely indifferent to his appearance. Perhaps his artistic instinct tells him that sweat-covered, with the dust of the road upon him, he is vastly more picturesque, more like the real, traditional "poilu," than immaculate in a new uniform of celestial blue. He is proud of the general's praise of his fitness and stamina after his march of fifty kilometres with a heavy pack on his back; he would consider it intolerable if he were reproached for some slackness in his dress, for buttons that had been displaced, for a belt that had slipped. These things are of no consequence, he says, impatiently. He does not understand that attention to minutiae which is the bee in the bonnet of the old-style disciplinarian. And yet tradition counts in

this nation of soldiers in a manner surprising to those who associate indifference with an outward air of insouciance. It is as if each man were a Fregoli capable of a dozen rôles. Certainly, at the end of a long march he will pull himself together with a brave air if he has to pass before the eyes of foreign officers or through a village street with the inhabitants lined up to receive him. There is pride at the bottom of his character as readily aroused as those instinctive martial qualities which he inherits from the great-grandfather of the Napoleonic Wars.

## CHAPTER X

### GALLIÉNI AND HIS POPULARITY

GENERAL GALLIÉNI<sup>1</sup> came to his task of defending Paris with a reputation gained in Madagascar. Nine years of successful government had transformed the island, torn with conflict, into a peaceful possession. Already credited with great organising powers, he was suspected of being a good strategist, and he was soon to prove it. His very appearance, energetic, thin, with large, osseous face looking like an eagle in spite of the *pince-nez*, gave Paris a wonderful impression of youth and energy. He was a man who would make things happen, conjectured the citizens—and, certainly, he looked like it. His stride was masterly, and his orderly officers grew thin in his service; there was a story of a plump private secretary who visibly dwindled in an effort to keep pace with the “patron’s” energetic gait.

Paris had never faltered in its attitude of pure valour even when news lacked and rumour stalked, gaunt-eyed, and unfettered by the least fact, along the Boulevards. Galliéni’s appointment to the governorship of the city put fire into hesitating pulses and new courage into hearts. To see him crossing the street in his uniform of cerulean blue,

<sup>1</sup> General Galliéni died May 28, 1916, while this book was in the press.

that attractive colour of the French Army, was to receive a lesson in youth and virility. He had the look of the fighter grateful to Parisians, who, recalling their past, did not like the notion of being handed over tamely to the enemy as an "open" city. An open city, forsooth! What ignominy for the capital of all the talents! When the Governor was formally invested on August 26, 1914, the muscles of his *administrés* grew tense with resolution. Then there would be resistance, resistance to the point of street fighting. Inch by inch the town would be disputed. The Eiffel Tower would be blown up, so that the enemy could not use its apparatus and antennæ to transmit or receive messages; bridges would be destroyed and the Underground would be rendered useless. The two million inhabitants who remained faithful to the city would be evacuated to the communes south and west of the metropolitan area. This was the plan as revealed later, and was apparently authentic. That the Governor thought the measures would be necessary I do not believe; but it was well to be prepared.

In his military eye the enemy could not enter the city until the home army had been destroyed; that was an elementary principle of warfare. But how much did the Germans know, definitely, of the condition of the Allies? One had to be quite sure of that before one could forecast with accuracy their line of action. Did they consider the Allies were definitely crushed? It seems almost certain that they did. Such a state of mind is revealed in the despatches they sent from the front, each more affirmative than the other. They told of the utter rout of the French, of their inability to withstand

the advance. Thus, as Colonel Feyler points out, the Germans were in much the frame of mind of Napoleon at Waterloo. History was repeating itself in new conditions. Napoleon disdained Wellington, whom he considered a mediocre general, and Blücher, a brave but blundering hussar, and so, without sufficient preparation, sent his legions against the British lines. If the German commanders had not the sublime arithmetic of Napoleon: "One hundred and twenty thousand men *and I* make two hundred thousand," that was the spirit of their calculations. They were impressed with their own invincibility. And there was some excuse for their belief that the English had been annihilated and the French demoralised. The British Army was only saved by bull-dog tenacity and a constitutional inability to accept defeat; the French showed a new quality of resistance because of the presence of their Three-Year soldiers—the three "Regular" classes with the colours—wherewith the reserves were stiffened into homogeneity. In any case, the Germans exaggerated the effect of their successes. The wish was father to the thought. The apparent direction of the retreat induced them to believe that the fruit was ripe and ready to fall into their expectant mouths. Surely, they argued, Joffre is going to repeat the mistake of Bazaine in 1870 and shut himself up in Paris as his predecessor did in Metz. He is anxious, certainly, they said, to seek the protection of the Paris forts, and yet he must know their shortcomings, for, forty years before, he had helped to build them.

But the cold fact remained that Joffre did not enter Paris, but flung down the gage of battle on the Marne, leaving Paris on his left as a protection to

that flank and the eastern forts on his right to prevent his line from being turned in that direction. Galliéni was quick to realise the situation, to see its possibilities and its dangers and the necessity for swift decision. If Paris had to be fought, the best defence was a forward move outside the city, an offensive-defensive. But a bare week remained before the Germans approached within striking distance. In those feverish days, the Governor of the city mobilised thousands of labourers and set them to work digging trenches. It was obviously impossible to do more than erect a temporary barrier against the tide, but the Parisians were caught and fascinated by the energy of their chief, who instilled into them his own confidence and his own combativeness. Galliéni knew his public with the divination of a psychologist, and he built barriers at the narrow city entrances with felled trees and stones torn from the roads. Obviously such fortifications could not stand a moment against artillery, but their purpose was as much moral as military. If they prevented Uhlans from capturing the gates by a forward rush, they were equally operative in inspiring Parisians with the reality of war, which some were in danger of forgetting, and at the same time gave them the assurance that they were being protected. The temperament of *la ville lumière* has something of the child in it: a curiosity and interest in everything, a thoughtless courage, and the need of constant assurance that it is being cared for.

And when the hosts advanced, sweeping from the north of Paris to the east, it was Galliéni who saw the fault and determined to profit by it. Von Kluck had disregarded the Paris army either through ignor-

ance or temerity, and he was to pay the price. The Governor collected an army from here, there and everywhere, placed it under a superb tactician, General Maunoury, and at the critical moment carried it to the field of battle. Our "intellectual general," as Gabriele d'Annunzio calls him, combined activity with perception. There was something Napoleonic and something Parisian, too, in his notion of utilising taximeters to carry soldiers to the German right wing, which, threatened, had reinforced itself with a *corps d'armée* and now seemed likely to envelop the French left. Up aloft Von Kluck's airmen decided that the Parisians were leaving their city by the thousand in taxicabs. It was Galliéni's army of Zouaves and Territorials hurrying out to strike a rapid and decisive blow at the invaders.

When Von Kluck marched straight upon Paris as if to devour it and turned aside to the south-east, he gave Galliéni, as we have said, the opportunity he sought. It is, of course, wrong to assume that the Germans suddenly changed their plan; this was not so, unless they wished to fly in the face of all accepted rules of war. It is highly dangerous to neglect one's main objective, the crushing of an enemy, for a subsidiary one. And if the Germans had entered Paris without defeating the Allies, they would have committed a heavy blunder. Heaven-born commanders like Napoleon could afford to take the risks and by their genius escape; lesser men have to abide by the rules of the game. Yet the Germans, proud in their superiority of numbers and equipment, might have supposed that they could detach part of their forces to finish off the Allies and with the remainder occupy the city. After all,

strategy is a matter of common sense, and the plain man can see the danger to a general of entering a city whilst his enemy is at large, powerful enough to imprison him within the walls and to cut his communications. To a strategist of Galliéni's calibre the problem was perfectly clear.

What he could not know, however, was the exact intentions of the Germans: whether they were going to attack the Home Army and simultaneously enter the city, or whether they would relinquish occupation until they had made certain of the destruction of the Allies. To meet the alternative he employed his habitual energy and resource; he was prepared for the two events. Even after the battle he took unlimited precautions, accumulating vast stocks of fodder and cattle in the Bois de Boulogne, until the famous playing-ground looked like a western cattle-ranch; he took, also, a careful census of the city, so that food might be apportioned to the population. As a military precaution he continued to construct trenches and defences of all sorts. Why did he pursue this mole-like activity of throwing up earth, since the danger was past? Galliéni had a double purpose: to reassure Parisians against the return of the Germans and to train the young soldier in the art of modern war. And so he built endless lines of trenches, until the country round Paris from Beauvais in the north to Fontainebleau in the south was scored and ribbed with excavations. In their depths he hid monstrous black cannon, ready to belch flame and disappear again into their pits. He left nothing to chance.

A year after his appointment to the Governorship, he rose to the higher plane of Minister of War. The

Viviani Cabinet had quietly given way to the Briand Administration, and, with that thoroughness of which the French are capable in great crises, they began to reconstruct their military organisation. His new post gave Galliéni a vast rôle, in which his lively temper and insatiable capacity for work found full employment. His part in the battle of the Marne had become known, and enhanced his reputation. It was realised that he had acted with immense decision. Thus he became newly popular with the Parisians, and his singular features—the eyes gleaming behind the glasses as if they were unsleeping in vigilance—were reproduced everywhere. His popularity threatened to rival that of Joffre, except that Joffre appealed more subtly and invariably to the army. The new Minister, however, was more Parisian than the Generalissimo, more distinctly Latin—Parisian, also, in a certain truculence more affected than real, for Galliéni is a tender-hearted man, a little diffident outside the strict orbit of his duty. He was particularly strenuous in his dealings with the *embusqué*. That furtive creature, who shelters behind the flag, was brought forth from his snug post in the rear. Several hundreds found employment at the Ministry of War; thousands more were scattered up and down the country in dépôts, in stores and factories, in headquarters of commanders. Galliéni routed them out mercilessly, and sent one hundred and fifty thousand of them to their regiments. From his own ministry in the Rue St. Dominique, one chilly November morning, there emerged a melancholy column of five hundred military clerks, who wended their way to the grey lines of the trenches, abominably wet and dismal, in contrast with those

comfortable Ministerial quarters. The Minister's implacability pleased both Paris and the country. Both were ready to do their duty, but needed to be told that there was perfect equality in everything and no preferential treatment. Galliéni struck pitilessly at abuses. A Territorial officer who drove his superior's car was punished as firmly as a *médecin major* who showed undue favour to certain of his patients and retarded their return to the Front. At times, no doubt, the Minister was guilty of exaggeration; but even this was typically French and was better than inactivity. In calling up auxiliaries (men exempted from military service because of physical defects) he overlooked the economic needs of the country; but these matters were soon put right.

He proved the foe of red tape and routine. He opened windows in his Ministry, which had been closed for years, and let in fresh air. He broke down the methods of the Circumlocution Office, doing away with useless labour, installing typewriters and feminine secretaries, the wives and daughters of those who had fallen in the field, and thus relieving many men for purely military duties. "Simpler methods," he cried to all who would hear; "I want results"; and, of course, he obtained them. Then he suppressed recommendations. To Parliament, a little dubious and jealous of its privileges, he explained that, whilst open to proper representations from every soldier, he could not listen to interested recommendations. He re-established the sovereign power of discipline, but at the same time constituted himself a court for the correction of abuse of authority. In the Chamber he conquered sympathies, though

obviously uncomfortable in the atmosphere. I saw him the day after his maiden speech as Minister and congratulated him on his success. "Ah, if you only knew how much this sort of thing costs me," he said, "you would not talk of my success," and he shrugged his shoulders with a gesture half-humorous, half-ironical. The soldier pleased in the tribune because of his directness and vibrant patriotism; but when Socialists interrupted him it was plain that he chafed at the restrictions of time and place which prevented him from making suitable reply! On one occasion he was about to leave the House because of the behaviour of the Socialists, and was induced with difficulty by M. Viviani to return to his place on the Front Bench. Unconsciously he had repeated the protest of General Pau a few years before. It was unfortunate that it was not more effective, for the opposition of the Socialists arose over a question of regulating the hours of cafés in Marseilles—palpitating subject in time of a national war! The Minister was happiest when dealing with the incorporation of the 1917 class—lads of eighteen who were going to the Front. The Senate before whom he spoke appreciated his patriotic quality, and the fact that, though a disciplinarian and an energetic commander, he yet kept in his heart the sense of sacrifice of young lives given to the country.

In every department Galliéni laboured to promote efficiency and to perfect the great machine in his hands. By some he was reproached for living voluntarily in the great white light of publicity, but Galliéni knew that unless he had the public emphatically on his side his reforms could be crushed

by politics. When once he had established his right to freedom of action, then no political cabal, thinking of its influence at the polls, could pull him down. It was for this reason that he took the public into his confidence, so that it might know that the best was being done that could be done. If Galliéni showed no mercy to the shirker, it was because he wished to encourage the peasant in the trenches and the mechanic in the factory by the thought that there was justice for all and favouritism for none. Much of his work was accomplished without the least blare of trumpets or the smallest paragraph in the Press. He reorganised the medical service of the army in the sense of bringing hospitals into line with authority, and suppressed the *laissezaller* of the amateur and philanthropic institution.

Though not in the ordinary sense a social figure—indeed, he is the despair of hostesses—Galliéni has social graces and an artistic side to his character wanting from the more burly figure of General Joffre. Though he keeps his counsel in all professional matters, he is not naturally silent; he has a dozen interests, not exclusively military, and touches life at all points. As a young man, following his studies in the military school, he consorted with a literary set in the Latin Quarter, and the friends of his youth were Ernest Daudet and Jean Richepin. He reads and speaks several languages, believing that one should go direct to one's authorities, and his conversation is informed with study, reflection and travel. He is the type of the modern soldier: *savant*, philosopher and metaphysician. A wide experience and intellectual tastes have given him

toleration, but he has none for incapacity and dereliction of duty. Though accused of overweening ambition, he is ambitious only to serve the country. "For an old man like myself, death on the battlefield would be a recompense," he said on a recent occasion. "I should die in defending Paris with the enthusiasm of a young lieutenant." This is the spirit which flamed from the historic poster on the walls of Paris at the moment when the Government departed to Bordeaux: "I have received a mandate to defend Paris, and I intend to fulfil it to the end. . . ."

It was patriotism which induced him to accept the heavy succession of the Ministry of War from M. Millerand. Years before he had been offered the post, but declined it "because it meant presence in the Chamber." But the war changed everything; it was impossible to urge personal reasons when the country was at stake. But he knows so little of political labels that he makes his friends laugh in confusing one kind of Republican with another. To him they are all the same, provided they have the national interests at heart. For this reason he was equally friendly with men of such divergent tendencies as Gambetta, Jules Simon, Waldeck-Rousseau and Albert de Mun. It is because of his many-sided appeal that he inspires collaborators with peculiar devotion. Two qualities outstand: his perennial youth, represented by a figure which might be that of a young cavalry officer, though he has passed the age limit, and a scientific precision of thought which means that in everything he is clear, precise, and piercing, like a sword-blade.

Illness caused him, unfortunately, to relinquish his post at the Ministry of War in the spring of 1916, after a few months of strenuous work, but his influence remains as that of a good patriot inexorable in his country's service.

## CHAPTER XI

### GALLIÉNI AND HIS COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

IF General Galliéni allowed his mind to take a retrospective turn in the intervals of his intensive work at the Ministry of War, there must have opened to him a dazzling prospect of colonial enterprise and adventure. And in the picture would appear a gallery of celebrities, brown, black and yellow, as well as white. The man who made the profoundest impression on his character was certainly Faidherbe, type of the serious Frenchman, whose spectacles added to the natural gravity of his face. His work as pioneer had ceased before Galliéni's had commenced, but his influence remained, powerful for good, and vitalising in its effect on the young mind. He realised that when you beat back barbarism you must attach the native to the flag and give him new objects for devotion. Before the War of 1870, he was engaged in conquering the Niger Basin. Galliéni was destined to complete that work. Like his master, as he called Faidherbe, he was inspired by the great English explorers, Mungo Park and Livingstone. The latter was discovering Lake Ngami when Galliéni was born.

Faidherbe fought in the War of 1870 as commander of the Northern Army, and won two rare successes against the Germans at Bapaume and Pont Noyelles.

Then he retired to senatorial and academic honours, and Briere de L'Isle reigned in his stead as Governor of Senegal. Galliéni joined him from his peaceful garrison of the Île Réunion. There he could have lazed and luxuriated to his heart's content, for there was nothing to do, but that was not his nature. He preferred to give himself to professional studies and to fit himself for the colonial career, for which he felt already a vocation, if not a positive predestination. In Senegal the opportunity came early to display his talents both as soldier and organiser. Ahmadou, son of El Hadj Oumar, founder of a Mussulman empire in Central Africa, was endeavouring to maintain his position by terrorism. An English expedition from Gambia looked like barring the way to French expansion in the Hinterland, and the Senegal Government felt there was no time to be lost. Galliéni, now a captain, fitted out his expedition, which started from Bakel in 1880. He took with him presents to placate Ahmadou, for the object of the mission was more political than military. We have a picturesque account of it, with geographical and ethnological details and amusing sketches of negro chieftains from the pen of Galliéni himself. He showed as much erudition as enthusiasm for his work, and did credit to La Flèche, the military school where he passed his boyhood, and St. Cyr, whence he graduated, as sub-lieutenant, on the very day—July 15, 1870—when war broke out with Germany. He was a real “son of a cartridge pouch,” as the phrase is, for his father, of an old Italian family, was the last commandant of a French garrison on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees.

The Captain underwent many perils in his search for

Ahmadou. His column was ambushed and half its effectives killed. The remainder took refuge in a valley, and the exultant enemy crowned the heights. Captain Galliéni, with the decision that always has distinguished him, advanced with a single interpreter to parley with the foe. The latter was so impressed with his valour that it let him continue his journey. But Ahmadou was coy, and hid himself in his capital of Segou, which he did not allow the mission to approach. For seven or eight months Galliéni and his companions were practically prisoners of the irascible Sultan, who sent each morning to tell them that they would be executed that day—news that affected them less than the deprivation of salt, to which they were subjected. Finally, by much patience, Galliéni wrung a treaty from his captor, giving France access to and commercial rights over the river from its source to Timbuctoo. It was a great stroke, and bore witness to the soldier-diplomat's courage and persistence.

Whilst waiting for the good pleasure of the negro Sultan, Galliéni was not wasting time. He was taking stock of the country, of its resources and its inhabitants, particularly in view of the extension of the railway from Kayes (the capital of Senegal), which was at the basis of French policy in the Soudan. The young officer's account of his travels brought him fame in France, the Gold Medal of the Geographical Society, the red ribbon of the Legion, and the rank of Major in the army. Though Ahmadou's trickery had somewhat compromised the success of the mission, important results had been attained, notably in knowledge of the country, and in providing facilities for the line. He was to see Ahmadou again.

He had returned to Paris for a few months' repose, and then had gone to the Antilles. Yet the Soudan called him irresistibly. His work there was not complete. He was now Lieutenant-Colonel and Governor of French Soudan. Ahmadou was at his old tricks; he menaced the colony from the north, whilst new adversaries arose in Mahmadou-Lamine, who had excited the fanaticism of his followers, and had put a small community in Senegal to fire and sword; in his son Soybou, who operated on the right bank of the Senegal; and Samory, a rather famous chief, who was suspiciously active in the south. It took Colonel Galliéni two campaigns to settle the agitation. The first campaign was both military and diplomatic. In its former character it had Mahmadou and his depredations as its punitive purpose; in its latter capacity it carried proposals to Samory to grant access to the Niger over his territory. Against Mahmadou, Galliéni proceeded with great vigour. On Christmas Day, 1880, two columns converged under the walls of his stronghold Diamou, about 125 miles from Bakel. The town was taken, but the chief had flown. However, the expedition was a fine piece of organisation, and no French column had ventured hitherto as far from its base; Galliéni had sown his rear with a succession of posts.

He parleyed more than he fought. It was his principle to conciliate rather than arouse opposition by strong measures. He founded a school for hostages, and sent the sons of the chiefs there as an excellent way of extending French influence, and established "villages of liberty," where freed slaves could live in peace and till the soil, thus promoting economic development and the repopulation of devastated areas.

The second campaign, undertaken in 1887-8, was just as active as the first and just as fruitful in results. In the interval, numerous missions of a politico-geographical character were organised. Swamps were drained, bridges thrown over streams, roads traced, and posts founded. Negotiations were resumed with Ahmadou. Soybou, who had continued his violence, was captured and given a soldier's death, out of respect for his youth and personal courage, and thus, like a good Mussulman, he entered into the Paradise of Mahomet, with the indispensable tuft of hair. It was a chivalrous concession that gained for the Governor new suffrages amongst the tribesmen. Nor did the young chieftain long precede his father to the bourne of defeated rebels, for Mahmadou-Lamine, was presently trapped to his last hiding-place and killed. Galliéni completed his military measures by building a large fort to dominate the district, and then pushed the railway up to Bafoulabé, a considerable performance in a bare, desert country. Remarkable changes took place in the character of the people in a very few years. The Colonel gained more territory by persuasion and negotiation than with the sword. He added 900,000 square kilometres to the French colonial domain, and 2,600,000 to its inhabitants. He was the real creator of the French Soudanese Empire, and laid the foundations of its political and administrative organisation. The results of his experience were embodied in a brilliant book: *Two Campaigns in the French Soudan*.

Now he was again in France, a full Colonel, commanding a regiment in the colonial army which he joined on leaving St. Cyr in the War of 1870. With that gallant force, popularly known as the

“Porpoises,” he was present at the heroic defence of Bazeilles, a hamlet near Sedan, by the famous Blue Division. The Division burnt its last cartridges before yielding to the overwhelming numbers of the Germans, who made prisoners of the survivors. Amongst them was Galliéni. He was interned in Germany, just long enough to enable him to learn the language of the conquerors. It was an early proof of his intellectual alertness.

The black faces of the Senegalese must now give way, in his colonial recollections, to the Mongolian type of Indo-China. The Black Flags over-ran Tonking. They were evidently encouraged by Chinese gold. Every day the list of their crimes lengthened : posts attacked, villages laid waste. No part of the colony, even the most settled, was free from them. Galliéni received orders from the Home Government to restore order and tranquillity. The officer, now with an established colonial reputation, began a systematic study of the problem. He found that his predecessor, Colonel Pennequin, had written a work, from which it appeared that the French were putting their money on the wrong horse in giving dominance to a race which was merely one of the three principal ethnical elements of the country. Injustice was created by this illogical preference, and tyranny had grown up. Colonel Galliéni re-established the balance by placing the races on a footing of equality. Then he attacked the question of the pirates. He discovered that economic conditions were partly responsible, and that brigandage flourished in particular soils. He set to work to change the temper of the people, to reorganise resources and to group and satisfy local demands for labour and self-development.

To his policy was given the name of "Spots of Oil." It happily expressed the system, which consisted in planting small posts in a region and advancing them gradually towards the interior, so that the radius was continually extended. He made instructors, agriculturists and mechanics of his white non-commissioned officers in these military posts. Both teachers and taught delighted in the arrangement, and the work proceeded rapidly. He was repeating in Asia the methods he had carried out so successfully in the Soudan. Against the pirates he acted with great energy, rounding them up with mobile columns until they were forced to yield. Upon the northern frontier leading into China he planted a triple line of block-houses linked by telephone, heliograph and pigeon post. To this day the installation remains, attesting the soundness of the defence against Chinese bands. And his friendship and understanding with Marshal Sou, the mandarin who represented the Son of Heaven as governor of Kang Tsei, was largely instrumental in stamping out piracy. The wily Oriental learned to esteem the high intelligence and energy of his white neighbour. With the capture of De Tham, the most formidable pirate, the activity of these hordes ceased, and in four years Galliéni had established peace. His doctrine had again prevailed: Draw the sword as little as possible; fight energetically when you have to fight, but whenever the occasion offers, discuss, negotiate, inspire sympathy; and, above all, civilise.

But Galliéni's chief work was done in Madagascar; it was the coping-stone of his colonial edifice. Civil administration had broken down in the island. Notwithstanding a costly expedition, French influence

was practically confined to the capital, Antananarivo, and revolt had broken out behind the advancing columns. The island, indeed, was seething with insurrection, and the new Resident, or Governor as he was soon to be, discovered that the Hovas were partially responsible for this state of things. Though they were given special privileges by the French—again in defiance of ethnology—they were unworthy of them. Galliéni, acting as he had done in Tonking, treated them as he did the other sections of the population. Fearing to alarm local sentiment, he called a halt in some reforms inaugurated by his predecessor and retarded the liberation of slaves, for which both masters and servants were unprepared. He began gradually to institute reforms, and to carry out the pacification of the island. He colonised with brains, in fact. Occasionally, he had to use force and show that he intended that French suzerainty should be a reality and not a mere shadow, such as Queen Ranavalona apparently regarded it. Two Ministers paid the penalty of their conspiracy before the Queen was invited to depart and take up her residence in Algeria as the permanent guest of the Republic. These measures received the belated approval of Parliament, though it had hesitated to take the initiative.

Having got the government of the island into his hands, Galliéni proceeded to apply his system in all its completeness. His most successful experiment was the division of the island into districts, each in charge of a commandant. To these commandants he sent recommendations worthy to rank with the best efforts of Roman Proconsuls. They were penetrated with good sense, enlightenment and precision. "When

you root out a nest of pirates, think of the market you must plant on the morrow," was one of his instructions. Another was : " Every advance made must be with a view to the permanent occupation of the country." Both admirably expressed his policy. He believed in markets and schools, in roads and bridges, as instruments of domination.

His fashion of securing collaboration was also crowned with success. With great care he selected his lieutenants, and then allowed them a free hand. He refused to burden his mind with details, and left himself free to reflect upon and discuss the larger issues. Thus, he summoned an authority on horse-breeding, and gave him *carte blanche*, within certain financial limits, to establish a stud-farm and provide the island with cavalry. " Give me your report in two years' time," he said ; " meantime, do the best you can." At the appointed hour the report was forthcoming, and the Governor proceeded to act upon it. It was typical of his *modus operandi*. This faith in his *entourage*, after having tested capacity and fidelity, was justified by its results.

His governorship of the island lasted nine years, and its effects were so satisfactory that it seemed as if a miracle had happened. Then, at his own request, he was nominated inspector of troops in Western and Eastern Africa, in the Antilles and Pacific. Thus his colonial career was rounded out, and his title confirmed of " the great French coloniser." In each of his posts, whether in the Soudan, in Tonking, or Madagascar, he had shown capacity and resourcefulness, an earnest and intelligent enthusiasm which had triumphed over obstacles, because science was joined to energy and knowledge to practical prin-

ciples. Thus the empire he founded was not built upon sand, but upon the bed-rock of native welfare and material advancement. His success in dealing with natives arose as much from his sympathy as from his determination to study the character and antecedents of his *administrés* with the care with which the physician studies the details of the case upon which he is engaged. Thus success came not as something due to fortune or caprice, but as a definite and calculated result.

Home again after more than thirty years of distinguished colonial service, Galliéni, now a General of Division, was given the 13th Army Corps at Clermont Ferrand, and later the 14th Army Corps at Lyons, carrying with it the eventual command of the army in the Alps. In 1908 he was called to the Superior Council of War. A year or two before the Great War, which was to give him his crowning position of responsibility at the Ministry in the Rue St. Dominique, he took part in the grand manœuvres in Touraine, and succeeded not only in out-manœuvring "the enemy," but positively in capturing the General-in-Chief and his staff. Paris laughed long over the episode; the victorious General was anticipating his laurels in actual war.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE HERO OF THE OURCQ

FOUR-AND-FORTY years he had waited for that tragic moment: the crossing of the frontier by the Germans for the second time. Through long years of monotonous preparation he had been buoyed up by the thought of serving his country in his country's greatest need. And now the opportunity had come—almost too late, for his normal career had finished two years before. But the old soldier in him arose and refused to be comforted by a country gentleman's occupations, which had filled his retirement. There was great work afoot; he must offer his sword to France. To his friends it did not seem that Michel Joseph Maunoury had greatly changed since the time when he was a spruce artillery captain, and student of the Staff College. Hair, moustache, and goatee beard had changed to white, of course, but the figure remained as slim and alert as in the old days when he galloped each morning in the Bois. Whatever the weather, he appeared in the *allées*, sitting his horse like a Centaur, and getting himself fit for the great day which he saw by his prophetic vision could not be very far off. He was haunted by the idea of *la revanche*, and was too honest to conceal it. The word was not popular with politicians. No public man dared utter it, save Déroulède and his League of Patriots

thundering against national apathy and supineness in their orations of July 14. General Bailloud, who afterwards distinguished himself in Sarraill's retreat through Macedonia, was punished for saying to his Army Corps at Nancy that the time would come when they would win back the Lost Provinces.

That Maunoury continually thought of these things is clear from the General Order that he issued to the Sixth Army on September 10 after the battle of the Marne. It is dated from his Headquarters at Claye, near Meaux: "The Sixth Army has just sustained, during five entire days, without any intermission or slackening, a struggle against a numerous adversary whose moral has been exalted by success. The struggle has been severe; the losses under fire, the fatigue due to want of sleep and, sometimes, want of food, have surpassed imagination. You have supported all with a valour, a firmness and endurance that words are powerless to glorify as they deserve. Comrades, the General-in-Chief asked you in the name of the *patrie* to do more than your duty; you have responded beyond what seemed to be possible. Thanks to you, victory has crowned our standards. Now that you know its glorious satisfaction, you will allow it no longer to escape you. As for myself, if I have done anything worthy, I have been recompensed by the greatest honour which could have befallen me in my long career, that of commanding men like you. It is with a lively emotion that I thank you for what you have done, for the revenge for 1870, towards which all my energies and all my efforts have been directed for forty-four years, is due to your efforts."

The document is a real profession of faith. It

bespeaks the man and his mission, his courage, his modesty, his patriotism, his long-suffering in the Cause. The Order was wrongly attributed to Joffre, because he had added some phrases at the end to express appreciation of the part played by the Sixth Army in keeping engaged a notable portion of the German forces on the Ourcq Front; but none who knew Maunoury and his intimate opinions could question its authenticity. When he signed the Order he wore for the first time (though he had possessed it since 1911) the modest little bronze medal, with its green and black ribbon, which commemorates 1870. Thus were linked in his mind the two dates—1870 and 1914—the one disaster and the other its vindication. Maunoury had every reason to remember 1870. He was an officer-cadet at the time, studying at the engineering and artillery school at Metz, the forerunner of Fontainebleau. When war broke out he was appointed to a battery, and arrived in Paris with it on the very day, September 14, when the Republic was proclaimed. He had no idea, as he marched through the streets with his men, that the Empire had fallen to a new form of government. But he was to see the popular temper even more sharply represented than that. At the gates of Paris was fought the battle of Champigny, and there Maunoury lost his fellow-officers and remained alone with a remnant of his battery. Then the rising tide of the Commune caught him in Paris, unwarned of the retirement of the Regular Army to Versailles. He and his men only escaped from the mob by disguising themselves in *mufti* and walking singly through the gates.

Happily, he was spared the horrors of a second

siege—that of Paris in the hands of the Commune. The first had left poignant memories never to be effaced. Yet his vocation was so firmly fixed that he was not to be turned from it even by this discouraging commencement. The possibility of avenging national humiliation braced his energies and kept him continually at work preparing for the inevitable day through more than two score years. He became one of the most authoritative teachers of the army. At St. Cyr, which he had attended as student, he became professor, and when Fontainebleau started its artillery course, it was he who directed it for the benefit of subalterns. Whilst he was professing artillery at St. Cyr, a great controversy raged on the subject. It was clear that France had been out-classed by Germany in field-guns; it was one of the causes of her defeat. The guns were more powerful, more accurately aimed, and more quickly served. The Germans had learnt the art of shooting, which the French had neglected. Though the De Reffye cannon was much better than its predecessor—a muzzle-loader, firing an eight-pound shell, which broke only at two distances—it was still far behind the German arm. The young war professor pronounced strongly in favour of power. The field-gun, above all, must be all-powerful, he said; mobility could come afterwards. The rival camp protested that mobility should come first; you could mass your light and handy guns and obtain the power required. But Maunoury unveiled what he considered to be the sophistry of this argument. The result of all this heat was the 75 mm., a model field-gun, which wrought wonders for France in the Great War. But its efficiency was not unconnected with an excellent shell.

Though he had studied deeply the lessons of 1870, Maunoury was not cast down by them, but rather stimulated to greater effort. Immediately after the war he wrote to his family a letter which shows his faith in his country's renaissance. "The frightful catastrophe leaves France mutilated, but she is not stricken to death. All can be repaired if she really wishes it." That was the language of a soldier and optimist, but it interpreted exactly the spirit of his countrymen and, above all, the capacity of their eventual leaders. He was well placed to form such an opinion, for, as General of Division, he became Director of the War School, and upon its benches sat the future commanders of French armies. Napoleon in his time made use of the material to his hand, often untrained scientifically—the soldier of fortune, of practical experience—but he held always that the best officer came from the Schools. And this generalisation is true to-day, truer than ever, because of the new character of war. Maunoury set himself against mere specialisation, and, though he became an expert, as we have seen, he enlarged his scope by studying tactics and then applied them in the field, by commanding first the Fourteenth Army Corps at Marseilles, and secondly the famous Twentieth Corps at Nancy, which looked directly in the face of the foe. As colonel he had commanded artillery at Vincennes.

He seemed to have written "finis" to the more active part of his career when he became Governor of Paris, but even in this post of pure routine in peace time, he invented methods of reform. He objected to the slackness that prevailed, and circularised against the slovenliness of soldiers' dress in the

streets, and even on the parade-ground. He tried to revive officers' interest in the morning ride in the Bois. Paris was amused and at the same time satisfied with a circular issued during the winter of 1911-12, which expressed surprise that the Governor met so few officers on wet and cold mornings in the Bois. Between the lines you could read his contempt for softness. Even in his most strenuous student days he had always kept himself fit by constant physical exercise. At the Cavalry School at Saumur, he was noted for his good riding; in the Bois his elegant, upright figure was a reproach against the carelessness of some officers.

He objected to *laissez-aller* in any branch of the army. Discipline was as important as guns and ammunition, he thought. Nor did he mean mere respect for established things or strict obedience to superiors. He meant that discipline of the mind which accepted principles and policies—the unity of military doctrine; he meant a constant training of officers in grand manoeuvres, that each might be accustomed to responsibility in the common scheme. Only by incessant practice could one attain perfection. And behind the discipline there must be patriotism. His example and enthusiasm infected the Paris garrison; in two years he had achieved marvels. And then the night parades, inaugurated by M. Millerand in concert with the Governor, aroused civilian enthusiasm for the army. Once more the streets of Paris resounded with the cry: “Vive l’armée.” Under the old *régime* it had become almost seditious as a sentiment, but now the whole street hummed and sang the *Sambre et Meuse*, and marched in rhythm with the beating drums and

shrieking fifes. Even *blasés* Parisians in the cafés and restaurants stood on their feet as the tattoo passed and the red-coated orchestras broke into a rapturous *Marseillaise*, with accompanying cheers. The *fond* of Paris is always patriotic whatever the surface currents.

When war fell out of a blue sky, Maunoury was tending his roses in his garden in the quiet village of Mer, near Blois. A few months before, his neighbours had asked him to stand for Parliament in the interest of the Three-Years Law; but he declined. Perhaps his near view of politics, as Commandant of the Guard of the Senate, had not conduced to a respect for them. In any case, he preferred his open-air life and his country pursuits to the feverish atmosphere of political Paris. When he went to the Luxembourg, where is situated the Senate, it was to attend a course on arboriculture—not to pay court to politicians. These he has kept always at a distance. It needed a war to wrest him from his gardening and agriculture, tastes the stronger for being hereditary. His family was long settled in the Loir-et-Cher, and one of his uncles had allowed Pasteur to experiment upon his flocks when investigating cattle-diseases.

The old ardour returned at the call of duty. First came dépôt work, important even if lacking glory, and then the command of an army at Verdun for the eastern offensive. Alas! it was unsuccessful, and Maunoury's, with the other French Armies, was soon in retreat towards the south. But the watchful eye of Joffre remarked an attempt on the part of Von Kluck, commanding the First German Army, to envelop the left wing (the English Army) of the Allies. He sent Maunoury to support the wing. The troops

detrained at Montdidier, to the south of Amiens. They arrived by divisions, and were flung, one after the other, into the battle-line—a difficult and dangerous process under fire. Von Kluck disregarded the army forming in front of his right, as if it did not exist, and concentrated his attention on the English force, which he wished to crush. Maunoury's orders were to fall back on Paris to form the siege garrison. When the order reached him, he ejaculated, "Heaven forbid! Anything but that." His memory went back to 1870, and there was revived the old anguish at the misfortunes of his country. None the less, he refused to lose heart, and kept a bold front to the enemy, retiring in splendid order after holding each line as long as possible.

Galliéni had seen the enemy's move from north to east and noted its strategic consequences. He communicated his impressions to the Commander-in-Chief, and Maunoury's army, hastily reconstituted and now composed of 100,000 men, was thrust again into an offensive against the flank-guard of Reservists which was protecting Von Kluck's columns as they glided past Paris. The assemblage of that army and its rapid transport to the strategic points constitutes one of the romances of the war.

The Sixth Army was composed of divers elements, most of which had suffered greatly from the fighting in the east and north. The cavalry, too, was fatigued by its long march from Charleroi. One of its important bodies was General Lamaize's corps, formed of two divisions of reserves, which had lost heavily in Lorraine. They had fought also at Amiens, whither they had been transported by train, and then they marched on foot to Dammartin, to the north of

Meaux, which was one of the points of concentration. To these divisions was added a brigade of Moroccan infantry. The second considerable element was the Seventh Army Corps, which had battled, also, in the east before reaching the Amiens district. One of its divisions was commanded by General de Villaret, who later was to be wounded with Maunoury at Soissons. Two divisions, which had fought at Cambrai in French Flanders, and had been much cut up; a division from Algeria which had just arrived in Paris; the Fourth Army Corps from Lorraine, where it had lost many men; a cavalry brigade and the First Corps of Cavalry, consisting of three divisions; a brigade of Marine Fusiliers, two-and-a-half battalions of Zouaves and a brigade of Spahis (native cavalry from Algeria) were also joined to the force under Maunoury. The fixed garrison of Paris consisted of four divisions of Territorials, who were also employed in outpost work along the line of contact.

The army was ordered to act in co-operation with the English, who had assembled in the Coulommiers district; but, unfortunately, there seems not to have been quite the co-operation needed between the two forces, though Maunoury detached a division to the help of the ally. The Sixth Army began the attack on the afternoon of September 5. In moving to their positions, the troops found the enemy's reserves strongly occupying villages to the left of Meaux. The General-in-Chief's dispositions were not entirely realised, and some critics blame what they call the hesitancy of the English in assuming a vigorous offensive. In any case the operations, after severe fighting, were generally crowned with success, and a

great part of the credit of the battle of the Marne is due to the resourcefulness and skill of Maunoury. An incident in the battle was the arrival of reinforcements in 1,100 taxicabs, mobilised by General Galliéni, in order to transport the Seventh Infantry Division to the left wing of the Sixth Army. The infantry arrived with great promptitude by this means, and was able at dawn on the morrow to enter into action.

Having distinguished himself in the defence of Paris, Maunoury was given the command of an army at Soissons. There he was wounded during the Spring of 1915, whilst making an inspection of the trenches with General de Villaret, who was also injured by the same bullet. General Maunoury's right eye was lost and the left affected. It meant that he could no longer hold his command at the Front, and this fine old soldier, who had done so much for the French Army, again became Governor of Paris, after an interval of three years. Some have blamed him for exposing himself in the first-line trenches only thirty metres from the enemy, but his principle always had been that the Commander-in-Chief should share danger with his troops. It is characteristic of him that he did not shrink from all the consequences of such a theory. There was something a little touching in the circumstances that in the twilight of his own life, after a brilliant day, he came to watch over Paris—*la ville lumière*—plunged into the deep shadows of a precautionary darkness. And then when his own light faded into a perpetual obscurity, he retired once again into the peace—alas ! the disabled peace—of private life, a sad but glorious end for an old soldier.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE MILITARY POWER OF ENGLAND

To convert an army of a few hundred thousands into a mighty machine of millions—what achievement ! And this, in a few months. To clothe, equip, and supply these men with munitions—an even greater task ! Yet this England did ; and French military critics were amazed at an exploit unequalled in the world's history. The little band of men who fought so gallantly at Mons, and whose opportune arrival helped to turn the first tide of invasion, have grown and increased to the gigantic British Army of to-day. Nothing delighted the French as much as the establishment of Conscription in England. It seemed to them like the gauge of England's seriousness. With their clear minds they had long realised that the voluntary system was inadequate to furnish the necessary resources to the army in time of war. True, the French, in their impatience to see England scientifically increase her army, forgot how slowly was evolved their own system of national service. Although, as we have seen, the Convention, in a moment of revolutionary fervour, decreed that it was the duty of every one to serve the State, a national system of compulsion, applicable to everybody, was not resorted to until more than fifty years after the Napoleonic Wars, and France had suffered

defeat from conscripted armies. Then, in its final form, compulsion became a drastic measure from which none escaped; but, even here, nearly another fifty years was necessary to implant and make good the system of absolute equality. Thus the French opinion which carped at England for her slowness in taking up an equal burden in the field was not quite mindful of French military history. These critics had not realised that the completeness of the French national military service had been the growth of many years, and that a vast national army could not spring into being at the mere waving of a wand; and hence it was impossible for England, even with the resources of her vast Empire, to have taken, *from the start*, an equal share in the war. Even had England adopted compulsion at the beginning of the war, there were corps of instructors to form, barracks to build, training-grounds to be found. These difficulties were quite apart from equipment, which hinged largely upon the supply of labour for the making of rifles. Lastly, there was the supreme difficulty of the higher command. Generals and staff-officers cannot be turned out with the speed of drill-sergeants. Happily the Press, instead of inflaming the spirit of criticism, set to work to explain the difficulties under which England laboured by reason, even, of the character of her institutions slowly evolved by the centuries. Both M. Cruppi and M. Henry Davray emphasised England's marvellous achievement in raising and equipping so vast an army, even before she adopted the principle of Conscription, and appreciated the difficulty of accommodating compulsory service to the notion of that individual liberty which is the corner-stone of English national life. It was clear that a certain

section of the British public confounded a national army, formed for a definite national purpose, with militarism of the Prussian type, and, therefore, had created a bogey which it was necessary to knock down before the principle of obligation could be accepted by a free and enlightened people. And it is typical of the conduct of the present war in England that it was the voice of the people themselves, the clamour of the man-in-the-street, which forced the Government to a decision. When the war broke out many thousands of Englishmen voluntarily sacrificed their careers to join the army. But in so doing they insisted that the manhood remaining in the country should be forced to do likewise. And the man who stayed at home? Was he averse from Conscription? Almost without exception the men who stayed turned to Westminster and said, "Fetch me if you really want me. Fetch me if the need is honestly great." No, the great British public—the men in the trenches, the men at home, and the women (above all, the women) insisted upon Conscription. It was Westminster that slept; Westminster that hesitated, Westminster (slow as ever in learning to "trust the people") that mumbled about votes when, even in those first days of the war, they could have insured probably speedy victory! Only when forced by the man-in-the-street did the Government act. Throughout the first stages of the war, the British Government, instead of leading public opinion, was driven by it. But in the eyes of a foreign nation, a country, unfortunately, has only the prestige of its Government, and the French, chafing against our slowness to adopt compulsion, little knew that John Bull himself was fighting, through a maze of lawyers' arguments, for

that very principle. The farm labourer who, at the beginning of things, asked, "Why can't they treat us all alike?" had his finger upon the pulse of the nation while the politicians hesitated and gambled with time. Their fatal lethargy contrasted ill with the patriotism of France, who, twelve months before, imposed upon herself a system of national service of the most complete character. No partial exemptions were allowed either in the interests of education or any of the liberal careers or even of poor widows' sons. The terms of service, too, were equally long for infantry as for cavalry. In Germany a larger and superabundant population allowed a fairly wide system of exemptions. Until before the Great War, certain categories of men were not called up; the infantry served only two years, and students benefited by a one-year system. French people do not always realise, I think, the immense price they have paid to escape from a repetition of the events of 1870. They have not realised how seriously has been impeded their own progress, thanks to the heavy strain placed upon their resources in men. It has meant the withdrawal of practically all the valid young men of the country from industry and commerce for the preparation of war. It has meant the retardation of marriages and a limited birth-rate, because young people could not marry until comparatively late; it has meant, also, that the smallest proportion of the country was in a condition to emigrate, for emigration takes place in the years of one's youth. Thus the French social and industrial system was under the domination of military exigencies, and France has made heavy sacrifices to escape from what she most dreads: the Prussian yoke.

The enthusiasm in France was, then, immense, when England finally decided to become an ally in the only true sense of the word : to impose upon herself a burden equal to that borne by her friends. But France breathed a sigh of bitter disappointment (disappointment which, it is fair to say, was shared by the majority of Englishmen), at the large number of exemptions at first granted ; and the excuses offered by English statesmen by no means assuaged the irritation felt both at home and abroad. For instance, "the maintenance of essential trade" had a sort of ironic ring to the French whose trade, either essential or inessential, was hardly maintained at all. They listened with a little smile of mockery whilst the British Minister spoke rather glibly, as it seemed to them, concerning the necessity of England being in a position to lend money to the Allies. There was a feeling, perhaps, that if they had suffered more, they would have been more anxious to end the war, and would have talked with less assurance of the necessity of possessing money whereby they could lend it to other combatants. The large proportion of conscientious objectors, also, presented a strange and sinister spectacle to the French, and assuredly so curious an attitude would not have been tolerated in France in the stress of a national war. It seemed a monstrous proposition that a class of society should have been allowed to accumulate wealth and a vast prosperity under the protection of the flag, and yet decline in the hour of need to bear arms from religious scruples. To the alert intelligence of the French, this was a grotesque and illogic situation, though they themselves remembered that they had had in the past their strict religious sects, including the Calvinists

and the Camarists. The good-will of the English people as a whole, however, was shown by the zeal with which this question of national service was taken up and adopted by a country naturally hostile to any interference with the old principle of voluntary enlistment; and the position would have been clearer to the French had they realised that the driving power in England was being supplied by the individual and not by the Government. The principle of Conscription was not advocated by Ministers; it was forced upon them. In small matters, as in great, the individual took upon himself responsibility. Frail, delicate women went without butter on their bread and little children denied themselves sweets. In France there was no evidence of any such personal sacrifice. People lived as well as they could afford. Why? Because they relied upon their Government to *enforce* any necessary sacrifices, and the individual, having confidence in its Government, felt no personal responsibility.

It is refreshing to turn from the question of Conscription, befogged as it was by the stifling atmosphere of Westminster, to our army, working under the stars, rubbing shoulders with our Allies in the trenches, and, amid the bursting shells, establishing friendships and understandings that are not couched in lawyers' language. There in Northern France a brotherhood has sprung into being which laughs at the arm-chair critics and takes no count of the blunders of politicians. But the arm-chair critic exists in France (as in England), and his garrulity in clubs and public places is by no means restrained by his lack of a real understanding of military affairs. Let us admit at once that the British Army has suffered from over

prestige in the popular imagination of France; the French people thought that England's help would be sumptuous, colossal, spontaneous and irresistible; and disappointment inevitably followed this exaggerated idea of the military assistance we should be able to give at the beginning of the war. One heard much criticism in France—indeed, one heard much the same in England: “Why did the English, for so long a time, take so small a share of the battle-line?” “Where were Kitchener's great armies that were to join with the French to drive the Germans back to Berlin?” “Why did not the English create a diversion while the French were fighting at Verdun?” Such murmurings and complaints followed the relief and joy which welcomed the arrival of the British armies in France, and, among the uninformed portion of the population, resulted in a certain cooling off in the sentiment of friendliness. It was useless to urge that the British Expeditionary Force could not achieve the impossible; that an army cannot be built in a night; that General Joffre was responsible for the general direction of operations, and that the British could make no offensive that he did not decree. French popular opinion persisted in believing in the god their imagination had created, and bitterly proclaimed its feet to be of clay. But such is the work of the arm-chair critic all the world over. It is his business to destroy confidence, to find fault, to shake friendships; and of far more real value is the opinion of the French military command of our army in the field. Here, again, we must be prepared to hear some criticism—but considered criticism that weighs difficulties and estimates conditions. The French military observer notes an absence of good

staff work on the English side, and he begins to account for it by saying that, to form a staff is a long and expensive process involving extensive scientific studies. Now it is apparent that, up to the time of the Great War, the profession of arms attracted rather the high-spirited and sporting type of man than the scientific student. In consequence, these excellent sportsmen were at a disadvantage, perfectly easy to comprehend, with the continental soldier. They had not had the same training. It was impossible for them to enter at once into the conception of men who had been making war scientifically—at least on paper—for many years. Excellent spade-work was done at Aldershot, but the General Manœuvres could not be compared in military utility with those conducted in Germany and France. Moreover, a long course is necessary in military history, for without this one glances at the map and finds nothing; there is no spirit of comparison available, such as history brings forth. On the other hand, if one has the sense of comparison developed by long and varied reading, the result is of the utmost value. One is able to say, “Napoleon did so and so in certain circumstances; what is there to prevent the modern commander from imitating him?” But without the knowledge such comparison is impossible.

It is alleged against our leaders that they were not sufficiently elastic and did not always allow themselves to be guided by circumstances. They formed a rigid rule and would not depart from it. They did not change their plans with the required promptitude when the necessity arose for such a change. They were not supple enough, not adaptable in their minds. Of the immense and epic bravery of the English there

was no question. "They know how to die," said a General to me, and the commendation expresses a universal opinion. There is something particularly Anglo-Saxon in the quality of this bravery. They stood resolutely to the guns, when perhaps it would have been better to temper valour with a little prudence. It seems to be part of our steadfastness never to draw back that we may leap the better; it is part of our magnificent quality to hold fast that we may be faithful to the end. Sometimes there is a pathetic side to this characteristic, as when a sentry posted outside British Headquarters was left standing in the road after the retreat of the officers, because he had not received his marching orders. That is typical of the British temperament with all its sublime self-abnegation; it is characteristic of the British leader, and it is certain that, in the eyes of the French observer, some element of suppleness might with advantage replace a little of our British stubbornness.

Of the new armies sent out by England I have heard nothing but praise. General Bonnal, the former director of the War School, writes: "Our dear Allies are as brave, if not braver, than we; and the athletic sports which they cultivate enable them to surmount material obstacles. Their moral has never ceased to be splendid and is always accompanied by unchanging good humour and gaiety." He, too, finds fault with some of the staff work, but universal is the commendation of the smartness and efficiency of English company officers, and particularly of the new class of officer, the student type—young men from the Universities who exhibit great facility with maps and show an immediate comprehension of the exigencies of modern scientific warfare.

But when we have left behind the arm-chair critic and the military critic we shall find that the British Army, small or great, has made a vast impression upon our neighbours, and the lilt of our pipes and the echo of *Tipperary* will linger in the lanes when the boom of the cannon has died away. Long will the "poilu" recall such exploits as those of the teams of grenade-throwers in the British trenches, who were much praised by Foch for their amazing work and the speed they showed in it, reminiscent of the dash and energy of a crack football team; and long will the French Army covet the equipment and smartness of the British soldier. It has been the *grand chic* to imitate the English officer as much as possible by the arrangement of straps and buttons and the rest; and some French Generals, particularly Gouraud (who was Commander-in-Chief in the Dardanelles and saw much of the British Army at work), have expressed to me their admiration for British smartness. "The British soldier looks smart even in his shirt-sleeves!" observed Gouraud.

In the matter of uniform, the war has provided a remarkable instance of the French ability to adapt oneself to new circumstances. When hostilities began, the French were still wearing their red and blue uniforms, and some of the dashing young officers went into battle at Charleroi with white gloves and plumes. Against them the Germans sent wave after wave of men in the invisible grey-green uniform. From the point of view of equipment the French were much behind us, and their red and blue uniforms were ludicrously inadequate for modern warfare, and contrasted unfavourably with the German grey-green and our own khaki. But this the French quickly

realised, and in the middle of the battle adopted horizon blue, which, though it soiled quickly, was, at least, an excellent uniform from the point of view of not being too conspicuous.

As to the services rendered by the Navy, the French, like the English, have not been permitted to lift the veil of secrecy which has cloaked the operations. The newspapers, particularly the *Temps*, have extolled its efficiency and have assured the French public that the seas were being swept. But they did not see the sweeper, and, therefore, were not always aware how excellently the job was done. Nor is the question of imports of such urgency in France as in England, as the amount of wheat brought into the country is infinitely less, and, without difficulty, could be supplied at home.

To sum up one's impression of French sentiment towards England during the first eighteen months of war one is bound to admit a certain element of disappointment, due, undoubtedly, to ignorance and misconception. The French public expected—as did we—a dramatic naval action to begin with. This Germany's cautious tactics denied. Furthermore, our Allies did us the compliment of imagining we could achieve the impossible; and when it was found that our small Expeditionary Force could take but a slight share in the operations, attention in France was concentrated upon our National Service system, and exasperation grew as our politicians played with the issues of life and death. But this irritation is merely superficial, and is evidence of the strain felt by a highly strung, nervous people, forced to stand still, for long months, while part of their beloved country lay under the heel of the invader. Nothing

can ever change the deep and lasting friendship between two peoples who have borne the same burden, shared the same horror, nursed the same hopes and fears. The understanding between England and France is no longer simply an *entente*; it is a brotherhood of tears.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SOME TYPES OF COMMANDERS

THE Generalissimo was, in a certain sense, less known than any of his Generals, for though much had been written of him, but little was really apprehended of his silent and uncommunicative nature. As the head of a powerful and almost anonymous organisation, he lived in a semi-seclusion. No politician could boast that he had his ear, for he kept himself rigidly from such influences. His popularity with the masses was remarkable, and his name became a symbol for economy in lives. None the less he dwelt apart in an atmosphere removed from all clamour and excitation, apparently unconscious of the intrigues about him. This segregation carried with it the disability of its advantage, for it involved a certain inaccessibility to political necessities, which even the strongest commander has to consult at times. "Moral effect" had infinitely less weight with him than military utility; indeed, it seemed hardly to exist in his vocabulary, and probably he bracketed this species of popularity and concession to the crowd with that private and subterranean influence of which he was perpetually afraid. Rigid in his solitariness he watched the conflagration from a lonely hill, silhouetted against the glowing sky, and none could say that he had pierced to his inmost thoughts. Nor

in the greater part of his career had he been in close touch with army life, for his occupations took him to distant climes where he engaged in road and railway, bridge and even town construction, thus removing him from military routine and strengthening those powers of reflection and cold, dispassionate survey which are his chief claims to a grateful consideration. And, doubtless, the desert and the jungle taught him nervelessness and that calmness which no vibration of calamitous events could shake.

De Castelnau, the second in command, presented a complete contrast with his chief. His character is open, his oratory at once humorous and compelling. Though a strict Catholic and attending Mass every day, his tolerance enabled him to employ as aides-de-camp two officers of the Alsatian Lutheran Church. His military science is so sure that he seems to divine in advance the plans of the enemy, and his experience of camps and courts, following on his missions to foreign countries, has given him the widest grasp of political affairs which in reality lie in the region of strategy. Probably the most accomplished General in the French Army, to him is attributed the plan of the great offensive designed for the Autumn of 1916.

The events of Verdun gave prominence to the personality of Pétain. Before the great attack by the Germans on the fortress, he was unknown except to those in close touch with the army. In a few weeks, he had become world-famous. His rapid promotion was due to the perspicacity of de Castelnau, who had the general direction of the line from Soissons to Verdun. The second in command observed the vast German preparations, the accumulation of guns and the massing of infantry, and with the assent of

the Generalissimo, set Pétain to work to stem the tide of the enemy advance. With characteristic energy the new-comer flung himself into the task. Urgency was necessary, for it was a question of days. Divisions were hurried up to reinforce the thin line of 12,000 men, garrisoning the twenty miles chiefly threatened by the Germans; heavy artillery was got together, sometimes improvised from forts and war-ships, and an immense accumulation was made of machine and field guns. Fortunately, the German attack was delayed by bad weather, giving the French greater time to increase their fortifications, and when the battle opened, a week later, the defenders were in a good position to resist the first awful thrust of the German battalions. None the less, the big guns of the enemy were superior in range and were more mobile than the French. This defect was partially compensated by moving back the French line, by employing the 75's as if they were machine-guns, and yet, in other directions, so cunningly concealing them that their fire could not be silenced.

The new commander of armies has the gift of inspiring the enthusiasm of his men. They are ready to die for him; to go anywhere at his bidding. His magnetism was as strongly exercised upon the students of the École de Guerre, where, in a memorable series, he lectured on infantry action. There is something in his manner, in his appearance, which excites the respectful attention of his listeners, who soon learn to regard him as a master. And the frank, clear, piercing eyes, the serene forehead, the handsome face barred by the moustache, wheat-coloured like the hair, until two score years and the Great War turned it to grey, seem the outward expression of the

character. He has the personality of great leaders, and those tense and tragic weeks at Verdun served to emphasise it. Personal influence counted for more, perhaps, than actual matter in his discourse. Clarity was its strong point, and an unerring touch which dissipated difficulties and revealed as by inspiration, in the classic battles of the world, the causes of victory and of defeat. Pétain sought the personal factor in all these great contests. He gave no mere record of facts, but studied the psychology of commanders, his conclusions representing original research and an untiring quest for truth. Character meant achievement, and the absence of it disaster. There could be no more pointed lesson to give to students of the art of war.

He was known as a man of exceptional talent by those with whom he came into close personal contact. His criticism of manœuvres in which he engaged with his regiment was suggestive and stimulating, and pointed to rare gifts of discernment. But if his reputation became strong in technical quarters, it did not involve promotion. He was still Colonel, mature and a little disappointed and even contemplating retirement, when war broke out. But contact with realities revealed his worth, and his ascension from the Great Retreat to the prodigious battle of Verdun was a record in rapidity. Placed in charge of the Fourth Brigade of Infantry, he received three days later the command of the Fifth Division. On October 25, 1914, he was given the 33rd Army Corps, which covered itself with glory at Carency, Notre Dame de Lorette, and Ablain. Officially a *divisionnaire*, on April 30, 1915, Pétain became Chief

of the Second Army, with which he led the great offensive in Champagne. He pierced the German lines with such speed and thoroughness that the plan of attack was somewhat compromised, for the General Staff had counted on a slower development. Thus the movement was stopped, though attended with great success.

Courteous in speech, he has yet a soldier's dislike for subtle and tortuous phraseology, and his whole tendency is to speak his mind. The result, however justly phrased, was not always palatable to authority, and, indeed, a plain statement of the truth is rarely a passport to official favour. His energy is legendary, and the effect of this is heightened by the appearance of youth conveyed by the pink-and-white complexion and the slim figure. As a young man, he is said to have danced all night at a military ball at Marseilles, until tired stewards came to him in the morning to ask him to desist out of pity for the musicians! Again at Arras, when in command of the 33rd Regiment of Infantry, he is said to have been requested by his landlord to depart, because his skipping in the morning annoyed the occupant of a flat below him! Thereupon, says the chronicler, he removed to a house set in a garden, where, presumably, there were no neighbours to annoy. The story is probably apocryphal, but it represents the energy of the man. Though he does not skip, he keeps himself fit by physical exercises. He considers that a General's vigour and power of resistance are as important as his mental equipment. To assure this nice balance of mind and body, a system must be resorted to. If one weighs food for the war charger, why not for the

warrior? That is his argument, and he acts upon it. No leader in the French Army has more persistently trained himself to support the rigour of a campaign, and none shows a greater activity. In the Champagne offensive, he ran three miles over rough ground at the head of his troops.

His principle is to leave nothing to chance, but to oversee and control everything. Thus, at the height of the bombardment of Verdun, he surprised his officers by visiting them in the most exposed positions. During the battle, he used an armoured machine-gun car as his moving Headquarters, sleeping there and conducting his business from it. At another stage in the gigantic battle he sat for five days and nights at his desk regulating details—proof of his powers of endurance. He drives like the wind over any road, leaving even racing motorists aghast at his speed. He is reputed to have used up a dozen chauffeurs in as many weeks. One said, pathetically, that he did not mind taking his chance of being killed in the trenches, but to drive for the General was like courting death. Pétain believes in sharing danger as he shares discomfort with his troops. As a Colonel he was often to be seen on the parade ground in bad weather without an overcoat—as an example to his men. If he has a deep and clear sense of his responsibilities, he is neither sad nor taciturn in private life. He enjoys social intercourse and is a charming conversationalist. Though unmarried, he adores children, and a friend tells me that he saw him when Colonel of a regiment romping joyously with children on his back.

His superiority as a soldier comes from his instant

vision. He sees a problem with such sureness, that his words bear the look of prophecy. Long before the war, he told a young lieutenant of cavalry that he would regret his arm, for upon the infantry, he said, would fall the brunt as well as the glory of the next war. His prevision showed that his thoughts were directed towards war when others probably were thinking only of their own affairs.

Calmness and equality of temper are the characteristics of General Roques, who succeeded General Galliéni as Minister of War. Possessing as great will power as his predecessor, he has a quiet and attractive way of gaining his ends without compromising their essential character. He finds the formula suitable to the occasion, and possesses the ideal temperament for a Minister of the Republic. Like Joffre, he has passed the greater part of his career in the colonies, where he learned the same lessons of self-reliance and of organisation. Like Joffre, too, he worked as an engineer in Madagascar, helping the future Generalissimo to build Diego Suarez, and afterwards linking by railway Antananarivo with the sea. Seven fruitful years in Madagascar were prefaced by similar periods in Algeria and Tonking and an expedition with General Dodds to Dahomey, which he undertook soon after leaving the Polytechnique.

Succeeding Joffre as Director of Engineers at the Ministry of War, he became Director of Aeronautics at the moment when France began to realise the military possibilities of the aeroplane. General Roques's spirit of organisation was as potent at the

Rue Saint-Dominique as in command of troops. Mounting by the usual stages of Division, Army Corps, and Army, he distinguished himself in the two latter situations on active service, and in the former at manœuvres one year before the Great War. For his personal bravery and skill in the field he received the War Cross and the Grand Cross of the Legion. With the dust of Verdun still upon him he took charge of Galliéni's portfolio and soon showed a vivid sense of the realities of modern war. His conciliation and tact and his quiet mastery of details earned for him the good-will and confidence of the army and of his subordinates. To that perfect mastery over himself which is necessary to mastery over others, he added a decision of character invaluable in high responsibility. He is of the school of Generals formed overseas. Of such are Joffre and Galliéni, Gouraud and Marchand.

Gouraud resembles Pétain in his judgment and charm as well as in his power over men. He inspires devotion, and carries the secret of command in a splendid face and figure. The empty right sleeve is a touching testimony to his valour, and for months he walked limping with a stick, for his right thigh and left leg had been injured also at the Dardanelles—the place of his dismemberment. It was after a day's bombardment and the Commander-in-Chief was watching the embarkation of wounded on a hospital ship, for there was no place to put them on that rocky shore, searched minutely by the enemy shells. One breaking from a Turkish naval gun threw the General over a wall and inflicted the injuries I have described. On the way home by ship to Marseilles,

gangrene supervened in the arm, demanding its amputation.

I saw him just after his recovery when, with a glad note in his voice, he announced his approaching return to the Front. In conversation with him one realised why he was called the "lion of the Argonne." There is something king-like in his looks—the brown beard, and the manly, well-formed features—and you are certain that the khaki tunic covers a lion's heart. His whole career has been of the noble sort: whether tracking Samory, the negro chieftain, into the recesses of his virgin forest, where he captured him after he had waged fitful war with France for seventeen years; or whether he was leading a sortie from Fez and clearing a savage horde from its walls. For this latter feat he gained the three stars at a time of life when most French officers have not reached a colonelcy. When the Great War broke out Gouraud hastened from Morocco to the east of France, where he led Colonial troops in unexampled feats of bravery. He was shot in the shoulder, but bullets cannot stop such a man; he seems to bear a charmed life as he passes heedlessly amidst a storm of flying, shrieking metal. His heroic soul is unmoved by the Inferno of the battle. Even the worst inventions of the devil are powerless against this perfect knight, dressed in the invincible and shining armour of his faith and patriotism.

It was good to hear him speak of his career as simply as if he were relating the banal life of some village attorney. Perhaps an ancestor who served in Napoleon's artillery, or a great-uncle who helped the Duc d'Aumale to conquer Algeria, were in measure

responsible for his military tastes. Certainly he did not get them from his father following the pacific profession of a doctor in a Paris hospital. At sixteen or seventeen years of age the Tonking campaign attracted him with its promise of adventure, but his youthful imagination was mainly fired by reading the travels and explorations of Livingstone, of Cameron, Stanley, Brazza and Galliéni. And the Colonies, whatever their bad old reputation in France for forming soldiers who were theatrical and had no notion of modern warfare, since they fought against savages, has proved in this war the nursery of manly virtues. Therein a man learns courage and endurance, self-reliance and a faculty for improvising everything. It has produced men of the type of Marchand, one of the most romantic figures that ever donned the uniform of the Republic. His hold over his men is quite extraordinary; they are ready to follow him into the jaws of death. His exploits in the Soudan recall a time when there was no smile on the face of John Bull as he looked across to France. A poet in his ideality and lyric quality, he has the sublime courage of the Early Christian, the personal sway of the born leader, the heart and tenderness of a woman.

No French general has come into closer contact with the English than Foch, for his army neighboured theirs for long months together, and none has a higher opinion of their qualities or was more sensible of the vast improvement effected in their fighting methods during the progress of the war. Foch is one of the most learned of the chiefs of the army; he directed the War School during a period of his career, and his

lectures on the art of leading troops in battle are models of their kind. When war broke out, he was commanding at Nancy the 20th Army Corps, which includes the famous Iron Division. As disciplinarian he offers no excuses for himself or for others for any failure in duty; and there is no soldier, if it is not Pétain, who has adapted his science more successfully to the problems of a twentieth-century war. Looking forty-five, though twenty years older, he is of those who prepared assiduously for the great day of the battle. Alas ! his own family were early victims of it, for at Charleroi fell his son and his son-in-law. Amongst his officers at Nancy was General Balfourier in charge of a brigade. Tall and slim and dark until active service had whitened his hair, Balfourier has the perfect manners of a man of the world. You would take him for a courtier if you did not know that he was a soldier and a particularly brave one. The Tsar's congratulations reached him in the midst of the gigantic battle of Verdun, where he had handled the 20th Corps with such skill and daring as to attract universal attention. There was always a perfect union between his infantry and artillery. He and his wife kept open house at Nancy to the officers under his command, and their handsome fortune enabled them to entertain lavishly both here and at their residence at Chantilly. The General's father was as far removed from Gouraud's from the trade of arms, for he followed the unlikely profession of a notary; but both obeyed the call to a soldier's life and achieved an equal distinction.

These, then, are the men who have led France to

victory. To-morrow others will spring from her fruitful soil and represent her courage, her hope, and her resourcefulness. The Great War has demonstrated the adaptability of the race. It is perennial in its freshness and inspiration.

## CHAPTER XV

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FIGHTING

WHEN the German horde surged upon Verdun, and was hurled back; when, again and again, they swept to the attack and left their dead piled high before the might and heroism of France—then was it most clearly demonstrated that the days of old-fashioned forts were no more. The fortress of stone crumbles before the mighty guns of to-day, and the hideous machines of war, belching forth tons of metal, grind steel and concrete into dust. Before Verdun it was proved that the fortress of France was the soul of her soldiers: a fortress that the mightiest guns could not shake nor all the horrors of modern warfare humble. To the armed barbarity of science the French soldier opposed his chest, and barbarism was swept back. That is the first lesson of the war of millions. In spite of all the fearful war machines—the huge guns, the gas, the liquid fire, engines of destruction before which man is as puny as a fly—in spite, too, of the impersonal strategy that moves regiments as pieces in a game of chess and seems to take no stock of the little soul of a man, yet, after all, it is the man that counts. Both combatants can pour out money,

both can heap up *matériel*, but the side that can expend the richest store of heroism is the side that will win. This personal element in the battle of to-day was the only factor overlooked by the war expert. Bloch, the great Russian writer on military science, foresaw only one end to fighting, and that was immobilisation, for each side would sit down in trenches and wait for the other; but the strange thing was that this new game of sap and mine, by a curious *détour*, conducted to the old hand-to-hand encounters, in which the right arm played the determining part and even the bowie-knife was resuscitated as a deadly weapon, so that we seemed to live again in the days of Fenimore Cooper and the Indian fights; and though the Germans sent at our trenches liquid fire, asphyxiating gases, flying torpedoes and all manner of explosives, all this science was accompanied by ambushades, by acts of treachery and *ruses de guerre* not unworthy of the Redskin in the most romantic pages of the novelist. Thus modern civilisation and savagery met and shook hands as men of the same family, unconscious of any difference in their mental equipment, unembarrassed certainly by any divergence in *Kultur*. And perhaps because of this personal factor in the fighting, which it was thought would be blotted out and suppressed in modern warfare, there was developed an individual courage so remarkable and romantic as to be unbelievable in its splendour, its intensity, and its quality of rich lavishness. Never since the world began has there been such an *étalage* of personal valour, such outpouring of splendid deeds of indomitable and deathless daring. Seemingly in the sombre

monotony of modern warfare there could arise no glorious exploit, and yet the trenches were frequently the unlikely frame of the most palpitating and stupendous defiance of man's nervous system. For the weak envelope triumphed by the grace of the soul; and man, though his teeth chattered by the mere brutal concussion of monstrous weapons, yet showed in his moral resistance a wealth and splendour of achievement unknown to the old and picturesque days. Thus, though the nations warred in such incredible masses that there seemed no room for personal bravery, yet never before had it been so richly poured out, so that even the spies were brave and went to their doom with hands untied and eyes unbandaged in utter calmness. Never in the history of warfare has there been a more splendid show of every human quality, whether fighting this desperate affair of the trenches or out in the open, under the pitiless rain of unheard-of bombardments, as at Verdun, where, in one single day, were fired 3,000,000 shells. And if there had never been a greater squandering of metal than in this Titanic conflict of the arsenals, there had never been a greater expenditure of those splendid treasures of sacrifice, or such a vast extravagance of youth and manhood, gold and precious stones from the treasury of all the manly virtues.

But if Bloch had discounted the personal element of modern warfare, his theories otherwise were justified by events. The Germans knew their Bloch and heartily believed his doctrine, but in the opening stages of the battle they made a desperate effort to escape from his conclusions. They began in what

Mr. Wells in a famous chapter called the "1900 spirit," that is to say, they were convinced that neither England nor France was alive to the latest trench warfare. Their first methods, the precipitate attack, massed movements and enveloping tactics, were dictated by the thought that their adversaries were old-fashioned fighters who had not learned this doctrine of the squatting war, who had not, in fact, read their Bloch or drawn from him the lessons the Germans had. And so they fought in the open in these first phases of the campaign, trusting by their force and speed, superior leadership and brutal shock tactics to bear down the Allies before they were prepared to meet them. And, of course, they were greatly aided in this traditional method of fighting by the fact that they had been allowed to build unchallenged strategic railways to their frontiers, which enabled them to pour a million men into the country, instead of the 300,000 that the French General Staff expected by the northern route.

The ready adaptation of the Allies to the new exigencies of war forced the Germans to rush to earth. There came a change so sudden that it seemed as if one had jumped literally from one century to another. "We have driven them underground," said M. Paul Deschanel, the eloquent President of the Chamber. But after they sank into the earth the Germans still made desperate efforts to escape Bloch's conclusion: that immobility which he predicted as being the inevitable result of the conflict of armed nations. They endeavoured by their inventive genius to break that immobility. By asphyxiating gas, by liquid fire, by aerial warfare (especially against

England), did they seek, as Mr. Wells points out, to create such diversion as would avoid so barren a conclusion to armed effort.

With the second phase of the battle the pulsing, stirring features of the old warfare largely disappeared. There was no longer the crowded rustle of the ranks, except when men crept in the semi-darkness from their trenches and attacked in the open against barbed wire and murderous missiles. The long, sinuous line of red, with its sheen and shimmer of weapons glancing back the sun, gay plumes to give a nodding note of youth, almost of feminine finery, had passed to the limbo of military museums and the pages of the historians of past battles. None of these things; instead, men in musty garments, covered with dust in summer or the mud of winter rains, and, in place of the cavalry charge in the open, the terrible twilight war began. Those who waged it shirked the daylight, dwelt in pits and crouched in dark ramparts as if the sight of God's good sun shamed them. Gone was the brave display riotous in colour and glory, glittering from ten thousand points. In its place was a lone and dismal landscape, a drab expanse of trenches interminably long; of furrows deeply drawn through the earth hiding living grain in their depths. Singular country, like some vast cemetery, stretching indefinitely towards a dull horizon, dead in its outer aspects, and yet hiding in its bowels the quick and the dead, the living happily outnumbering those who live no more. Of course, the great novelty of the war was its vast length of front. In France it stretched from the North Sea to the rocky ramparts

of Switzerland, 700 kilometres across the fair land of France; and if one counted all the ramifications and convolutions, then 10,000 kilometres represented the sum of this amazing and ceaseless industry which turned soldiers into navvies; moreover, this trench warfare was universal where fighting occurred, and was not special merely to Belgium and France, for it existed in Russia, in Mesopotamia, and the Balkans. A French Army Corps numbers 35,000 men, and, taking the general character of the ground, the parts that can be naturally defended with those that require barricades of barbed wire and other obstacles to reinforce their strength, this Army Corps can hold a line of ten kilometres. Thus 2,000,000 men is about the normal garrison of a line of 500 kilometres. But it must not be supposed that the lines are uniform; they vary considerably. For instance, where the ground is steep and rocky, the defence is rendered easier and the guards of the first trench may be less numerous than in cases where the conditions are more favourable to attack. But such matters are settled by the local commandant, who takes into consideration all the conditions and makes his dispositions accordingly. There are parts of the line where it is not necessary to place men because the parts are enfiladed by cannon, and other places where every mechanical means has been resorted to for strengthening the trenches. The telephone is largely used, and is linked with advanced posts, called *postes d'écoute*, where the observer can note the least activity in the enemy's trenches. Thus the men guarding the first-line trenches can be sensibly reduced, leaving a greater proportion to remain in the

second-line trenches and in rest chambers dug out of the earth at the ends of the lines. Of course, the trenches vary considerably, and the commander takes note of the character of the soil. He makes use of a hill-side, even of the ditches with embankments on the side of the road, of every natural conformation of the soil, and the number of men necessary to defend the line varies according to these circumstances.

It is true, certainly, that trench warfare has inflicted a great loss of the picturesque, of glittering movements, of kaleidoscopic effects which turned and twisted into wonderful pictures; the picture to-day is replaced by a melancholy waste of earth scored and humped into mounds.

Within was life, and no end to labour, for there were trenches, always more trenches to be dug as the line swayed or curved in new forms, yielding to pressure or being broken by it. And in the trenches themselves there was a perpetual search for improvement, and the longer the troops stayed there, the more highly organised became their abodes. If there was not an abundance of hot water there was generally enough of cold, and gas on every floor; alas! too much of it. There were wooden floors and wooden walls and pictures, and even sculpture adorned them. In these subterranean passages dwelt our men in a kind of heroic enjoyment of a battle without issue, of a sort of deadly ding-dong, only varied by the blackening of the sky with the monstrous smoke of projectiles that count a man a mere atom in their whirlwind path—fearful engines that lay waste the country, that reduce villages to a hopeless jumble

of stones and bent iron and splintered wood, with derisive-looking chimneys floating in a troubled sea, like derelicts in the track of a tornado.

It was clear that in this squatting war all traditions had crumbled hopelessly and wilted away. The monstrous engines belched fire and destruction. From the caverns themselves, deeply cut in the once fertile fields, issued a storm of shot and shell from machine-guns, from mortars of an old-fashioned type, from cannon of the newest type—every imaginable engine of destruction, down to the old hand-grenade, again in usage from a distant past—a past so ancient that Scott reminds us in *Rob Roy* that “in those days this description of soldiers” (*i. e.* the Grenadiers) “actually carried that destructive species of firework from which they derive their name.” Thus every device known to man’s inventive and destructive brain was directed into a new and diabolical channel, and from time to time the vast engines employed emitted a rending noise as if the earth were spitting flame and its rocky ribs had shattered into quivering fragments—a volcano in its most fearful mood, sending forth a mad jumble of rocks and a living stream of lava devastating and devouring.

A gaunt and desolate country haunted by the melancholy crows, resounding with clacking detonations of fusillades and a hoarse bass of heavy cannon, is the place of invisible war. One rubs shoulders with it without being aware of it. One comes suddenly upon it in all innocence. A journalistic friend, at the beginning of the war, dashed into its area all unknowing that he had come on top of it. To his

unpractised eye the lines were no more clearly marked than the Equator or the North Pole. And, of course, every effort is made to conceal the battle-field. Beet-root grows riotously on battlements, guns hide behind trees and are covered with branches, so that the airman, peering from his height, sees nothing but the flicker of leaves. The line hides itself as soon as it fights, and without loss of time prepares against a possible retreat. That is the method of it. Should it be driven back, there are strong positions in the rear for the rallying, for the defence *à outrance*, and for the counter-attack. Fronts have two or three lines of shelter trenches, deep enough to cover a man and generally a yard in width. These trenches are proportioned to the effectives employed. They contain redoubts and blockhouses where guns are placed; they are linked by zigzag paths, and, as a last resort, with a trench of cement, a veritable fortress where are cannon as well as machine-guns. These covered over and fortified trenches nearly always contain rest chambers and magazines for rifles and the different sorts of ammunition required.

The lesson of this trench warfare, therefore, is that if a combatant retires before it is too late he has every chance to survive to fight another day; and he has all the more chance of a new offensive, or at least of maintaining a strong defensive, if he retires in the direction of his resources, or what is called his line of operation, whence he receives his munitions, food and material of war. He retires from the battle, therefore, at the psychological moment when he sees he is likely to be overwhelmed, and reconstitutes himself in the rear.

The opening phases of 1914 gave us two parallel retreats: from the Belgian frontier to the Seine by the Allies, and from the Marne to the Aisne by the Germans. The campaign in Poland also showed a similar disposition, and the Russians reformed their line and beat the Germans after they retreated before them. Therefore a mere retreat may be, literally, little more than a strategic movement in the rear. It does not mean, certainly, that all is lost or that the position of the retreating force is one of utter hopelessness.

After the opening phases of the war, the subterranean character of the fighting was maintained, until such big offensives as Verdun re-evoked the old-time battle, when the Kaiser watched the operations from an eminence, and on a front of twenty miles scenes of the old onslaught were re-enacted. But in this case the initiative was left to the Germans. To them also the greater part of the losses, for whilst they manœuvred in the open and hurled masses of their grey-green warriors upon the French trenches, the defenders enfiladed the masses and mowed them down with the gigantic scythes that their science had forged since the war began.

A curious feature of the fighting in the Great War was the element of fatigue. We have met with it everywhere. It follows closely the course of the war; it is seen in every phase. At Charleroi and Mons and those terrific fights that marked the beginning of the war, the retreating armies of England and France escaped because of the exhaustion of the Germans. If cavalry had harried their rearguards and mobile cannon had cannonaded their flanks the retreat

might have been turned into a rout. For the French, largely composed of reservists, were within an ace of demoralisation. And again the Allies, as conquerors, showed extreme fatigue in the battle of the Marne, when the victory might have been more decisive had it been followed up by unwearied troops, or, again, by masses of cavalry.

The cavalry, indeed, of both combatants proved singularly ineffectual, and, as I have just pointed out, failed as a means of attack or to pursue retreating armies; and an interesting feature was the dismounting of the cavalry and its employment as infantry in the trenches. Cavalrymen were divorced from their horses and given infantry guns; and their equipment and appearance approached very nearly that of the foot-soldier. The Cuirassiers, for instance, took off their picturesque manes and removed the top pieces of their helmets, and thus very nearly imitated the *bourguinet*, or low, mediæval-looking helmet of the French infantry. Even reconnaissance, the old duty of the cavalry, has been undertaken by the aeroplane; and the horse-soldier, indeed, has little place in modern warfare. Some experts, however, hold that a new rôle has emerged from the war which the cavalry is qualified to fill. It consists in their employment in large forces flanked by mobile cannon and cyclists, whereby their offensive radius is greatly extended.

In these few pages I have endeavoured to sketch the varied phases of a war that opened with the glittering pageant of the time of Napoleon and merged into the dreary and sombre monotony of

trench warfare. The "heroic" days of battle were over, but a new heroism arose. Men fought no longer to triumph as men among men; they were content to go forward, nameless and unrecognised: "to march heroically" (in the words of the French writer), to become, not men among men, but—

"des morts parmi les morts."

## CHAPTER XVI

### MILITARY COMMAND AND THE REVOLUTION

“ON nous fait une guerre ennuyeuse !” How often was the plaint heard in France, where this war of “wait and see,” this terrible game of patience, racked the nerves not only of the soldiers in the trenches, but of the multitudes who scanned the morning news in the hope of some startling manœuvre and stunning victory which should end the hideous nightmare of trench warfare. Had Napoleon and his like passed, then, for ever? Could France never produce his peer? A man who would rise above all difficulties; who would drag guns over the snows in hollowed-out tree-trunks; who would arrive where no man had arrived; who would achieve the impossible? Times, it is true, had changed, but sound opinion urged the recognised fact that there is only one kind of strategy, just as there is only one geometry. The geometric truth of to-day is the geometric truth of a thousand years ago; it never changes. Thus, strategy is always strategy, though the circumstances may change, and the café critic was a little inclined to blame the military command for the dreary monotony of the conduct of the war.

Historians such as Dupuis and Aulard, the eminent professor at the Sorbonne, recalled Convention days, when youthful Generals were selected through the

intervention of commissioners from the Government, who visited the armies, interrogated everybody and discovered talent. Sometimes they did not discover it, but only thought they did. The unhappy man, perhaps only just promoted from non-commissioned ranks, was dragged from his obscurity and placed, often against his own will, in command of an army and told to get victories or take the consequences. Good patriots were not allowed to refuse such signal honour as serving the country in a position of responsibility; and, placed between the devil of their own incompetence and the deep sea of the guillotine (for if they failed they would be hailed, certainly, before the tribunal and treated as traitors), they occasionally managed in sheer desperation to win; but more often they miserably failed, and joined the number of the suspected in the Conventional prisons.

Not only were these unfortunate people appointed, willy-nilly, to the command of armies whenever they attracted the eye of the representatives, but, once arrived at the perilous summit of their power, they were watched and their conduct noted as if they were the most disreputable of mortals. And their judges were not only the Convention, but the secret committees and clubs which flourished at that moment. Nevertheless, the results of this terrible system were astonishing. The most celebrated of the representatives was Carnot, who was in every way an exceptional man. On the eve of the battle of Wattignies, in October 1793, he obliged Jourdan, the General-in-Chief, to effect a frontal attack, which failed. Thereupon a council was held, and the two men were seen to differ materially in their views. Carnot, with characteristic impetuosity, offered to assume

responsibility for his opinion and even to see to the execution of his plan. On the morrow, Carnot, who kept Jourdan under close observation, noted a column falling back before the pressure of the enemy. Instantly he seized a rifle, placed himself at the head of the retreating force and led them back into action. Thanks largely to his energy, the battle was won.

Saint Just was a man of similar type. In the operations on the Sambre, which were unfortunate, for a time, for the Revolutionaries, Saint Just and Le Bas pushed the armies to combat, it has been said, like a pack of dogs, without observing any rule of war. There is a memorable scene related by Dupuis. Saint Just convoked the Generals to a midnight council. "You are convoked," he said, "to do something great—worthy of the Republic. To-morrow there must be a siege or a battle; decide!" On Kleber smiling satirically, Saint Just rushed out into the darkness of the garden and remained there, hatless, for two hours, though the rain was falling in torrents. However, from all this confusion and tyrannous intervention and diversity of counsel emerged the victory of Fleurus, in the neighbourhood of Mons and Charleroi, which speaks so closely nowadays to our hearts. The Revolutionaries crossed and recrossed the river many times before they succeeded finally in overcoming the Austrians. And this victory marked the end of the peril of invasion, which was the excuse of the presence of the representatives with the armies. Washington said that an army must be led with absolute despotism to ensure victory; the armies of the Revolution certainly merited success from that point

of view rather than by the talent of terrorised chiefs—men whose previous career was often that of a *sous officier*, and totally unfitted them for positions of authority. Balland, who commanded a division at Wattignies, was a drummer in a company of grenadiers, and, according to a contemporary historian, “cleaned our boots and ran our errands.”

Yet some of outstanding character and talents profited by this system, which advanced a man like Napoleon to dazzling heights. The terror and confusion of the time gave him the chance he needed to soar. Whilst weaker men drowned in the storm, he rose triumphantly above it. And his first chance came through his connection with Saliceti, one of the representatives, who was a fellow Corsican and had taken part with Napoleon in struggles in the island against the dictatorship of Paoli. They met on the Riviera, where Napoleon, a simple captain, was transporting war stores. Toulon was being besieged; Napoleon, in the ardour of his temperament, proposed a plan to Saliceti and his colleague, Augustin Robespierre, the brother of the dictator, who happened to be there, insisted on conferring on him the rank of Brigadier-General, with command over the artillery in the army of Italy. Without these influences, Napoleon would have had to wait long for his preferment. Robespierre was particularly struck by Napoleon, whom he regarded as of transcending merit and, moreover, a sound and fervid Republican!

Though Napoleon was accompanied, as the others had been, by the commissioners of the Convention in his campaign in Italy, they were men of an ordinary type, and he knew how to get the better of them.

Moreover, he was extremely astute in his dealings with his possible accusers, and played a definite political rôle. He became, then, the favourite of Barras, the most influential of the Directorate, and finally, thanks to Barras and Carnot, obtained command of the Italian Army, which was the height of his ambition. Here he was able to give the measure of his military genius. His ardour and audacity were equal to every situation, and his popularity rose to such heights with the masses dazzled by his victories, and he inspired such confidence amongst the Convention itself, that he conquered his independence of action. Under the former tyrannous rule of the Convention the strategist was a mere puppet in the hands of the Government; Napoleon was not long in restoring all the old power to the General and giving to strategy its full amplitude, for he was able, as he rose to be Consul, Life Consul, and finally Emperor—all in four years—to control the political destinies of France, and thus add to the military arm the civil power, and make the former serve the ends of his foreign and internal policy.

It is well to remember that Napoleon owed much of his advancement—his promotion at the age of twenty-seven to the rank of Commander-in-Chief—to his clever utilisation of the social disorder which followed the Revolution, and he obtained that liberty of which he had need to beat the enemy, as Colonel Dupuis points out, by his adroit relations with the Government. His personal prestige soon placed him above those who had given him the power. Finally, strong in his immense successes, he threw off the remaining shackles and conquered the right to act as he thought best. He himself became the Executive.

He was in the enviable situation of a man who gives orders to himself.

This page of the past is sufficient answer to the clamour for the heroic methods of the Revolution. French people have only to look back to recognise the danger of allowing ambition to realise itself either in the army or in politics—still worse when the two are united. A later instance, and one even more terrifying than that of Napoleon I, was that of Napoleon III; for, though his Empire similarly ended in disaster, brought about by foreign intervention, in the one case it represented the paling of a star of surpassing effulgence, whereas in the other it was the mere pricking of a bubble, if “historic,” reputation. But in each event it brought humiliation and the foot of the invader on the soil. Joffre, therefore, a democratic and constitutional commander—the antithesis of Napoleon—is the only type of general really acceptable to the French Republic; and though the thoughtless individual may sigh for the breathless succession of events of Napoleonic days, there is hardly a Frenchman who would be prepared to accept the consequences of a return of the Napoleonic system; and Joffre, working for war that he may accomplish peace, eschewing inspiration and “strokes of genius,” steadily developing in quietude and reflection the details of a preconceived plan, is an ideal figure in a country as profoundly democratic as France, where a chief modelled on the Prussian type or given to vain display and the “panache” would inevitably cause a reaction unfortunate in the interests of national defence. Never again will the French, having learned in the bitter school of experience, place power in the hands of a man who, by

his masterly temperament, raises in their minds the fears of a dictator. *Non bis in idem.*

But not until the second year of the war was Joffre given that supreme command and that independence of action so essential to success. Only in 1916 was it recognised that there must be a co-ordination of effort in the different fields; that the Allies could not act separately without relation to each other and hope thereby to advance the common cause; they must carry out a certain preconceived plan and carry it out with a common energy, subserving all questions of persons and national prestige to the unique end of winning the war. The English Army, after the retirement of Marshal French, was placed directly under the orders of Joffre; thereafter it had its exact place in the common movement and represented a certain intimate part of the general machine. England thereby showed her loyalty and her conception of the necessities of the hour in bending to the principle of French dominance. It was inevitable, for the French were the chief combatants on the Western Front; their army was necessarily the more numerous and they were defending their own hearths and homes; the war to them was in reality a war of liberation. After, then, the general objects of the Allies were defined, it was seen that there must be unity of command. I remember how urgently a celebrated French General spoke to me on this subject after the war had lasted a year. "For the sake of our common action," he said, "do insist in England on the necessity of oneness in the command. Otherwise, the problem is impossible." And when that principle was at last acknowledged, and England

merged her military fortunes more deeply with those of France, sacrificing also some of her independence in the field, the Allies were approaching the German homogeneity, where the Kaiser conducted the mixed orchestra and called the tune. Whatever the music was like, the general effect was certainly better than if there had been two or more chiefs and as many tunes.

But although Revolutionary times were no more, when generals of twenty-three gained such triumphs as when Rocroi was won by Condé, yet the fierce spirit of the Revolution remained. In that sombre hour France triumphed because she had the fierce determination to win; because she was ruthless with old-established reputations unless they responded to the exigencies of the hour; and also because, having her back against the wall, she realised that it was literally a case of "conquer or die." So in the war of to-day, the military command was aided by the popular clamour which speeded up the machine. When Charles Humbert, Senator of the Meuse, and certainly one of the organisers of victory, claimed almost daily in *Le Journal*, which he directs with such vigour, "more cannon and more munitions," he was but repeating, at a distance of one hundred and twenty years, the cry of Carnot and Lindet, who were rather disdainfully called "the Workers" by their colleagues of the Convention. But the harvest of the Revolution that the Generalissimo reaps most richly is that extraordinary and unsuspected virtue which our Allies have shown, that bull-dog tenacity and resistance which, blending with the natural *allégresse* of the French, made them irresistible in battle where the conditions were at all equal. In the last resort, the quality of the fighter prevails;

every observer has recognised that fact. The guns may thunder and deal out death and destruction, but the machine which finally counts is the white arm, "Rosalie," as the bayonet is named in the familiar speech of the "poilu." This fact accounts for the superiority of the French on the field of battle; for the final word is to the common soldier, to that astonishing peasant and tiller of the land, who constitutes the greater part of the armies of the Republic. He fights, as I have said earlier in this book, not because he must, but because he feels he is privileged to defend his fields against the invader. Ever present to his mind, as he meets the Hun, are the depredations and deeds of horror of this civilised savage, and his arm is nerved by the determination to save his own village and his own kith and kin, if possible, from his devastations. The personal feeling enforces the personal element in battle; and, after all, a Holy Cause is the best sort of armour in which to engage in battle and the deadliest weapon to wield against those who have sinned against all the laws of humanity.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SPIRIT OF THE TRENCHES

THE spirit of the trenches is the spirit of France. Never did mirror more faithfully reflect the personal traits than those endless trenches across France the splendid valour of the race. In no preceding war in history has courage been so abounding. Trench warfare created a spirit of intimacy as well as a spirit of adventure. Men of differing stations, of utterly opposed traditions, of antagonistic education, were thrown together in a narrow, self-contained comradeship, and the result was a firm and singular fusion. They partook of the same risks, they experienced the same emotions, whether standing shoulder to shoulder in the trenches, or racing, side by side, in some rush attack, storming villages, or retiring, it might be, beneath the pressure of an overwhelming cannonade. And out of this comradeship grew a conventual feeling. Though isolated from the ordinary world, they were yet of it, for family ties triumphed over even so radical a difference in experience and mode of life. The rigours and segregation of the camp-life could not separate from kith and kin.

Some have compared their existence with the cloistered life. True, they took no vows of celibacy,

nor was continence the necessary attribute of their association, but they had sworn to serve in a deathless constancy. They slept and lived hard, exposed to inclemency; passed days in a narrow semi-darkness, and at night slept in the roughest shelters or in grottoes deep in the ground. Yet there was an essential difference in their state and that of those bound to the Church, for their thoughts were of earth rather than of Heaven—of some distant spot whereon stood a little white house surrounded with trees, with green fields beyond, where cattle grazed, children played, and geese cackled. Tender memories accompanied their vigils, and such human sentiments removed them from the category of the saints, who are not supposed to listen to the heart, and from the old professional class of soldier, the *grogards* of Napoleon's day. For between waiting France and fighting France there passed hourly a warm current of correspondence, ascending and descending, informed with honest passion, homely and kindly virtues, which softened and humanised the soldier's solitude and heartened the civilian. It was the "poilu" who, going to the war, comforted those who remained behind, and the strange thing was that pessimism more readily took root in security, far from the lines, than at the Front itself. And the soldier's courage was as much seen in his letters as in his conduct in the field—wonderful tribute to its depth and sincerity. For there were moments in the interminable war to try the nerves of the hardened campaigner, much more those of the young man but lately broken to its severities.

Yet there was never a tremor in the living wall

encircling *la patrie*, no touch of despair in the letters that Dupont pencilled home in the intervals of bombardment. His natural gaiety found an expression there, as well as his courage and his calm. Letters from only sons, out of reach for the first time of maternal solicitude, manifested an almost disconcerting enjoyment of danger and the independent life. And those women who had feared hitherto for the health of their darlings now seemed to rejoice in new proofs of their courage and contempt of death. Lads, apparently the most deeply wedded to the soft and unheroic existence of towns, found an unexpected satisfaction in the strenuous routine of camps. The influence of the *milieu*, the daily contact with the hard practices and risks of the *métier*, riveted armour about the soul and bound the brows with brass. Men, whose habit in civil life led none to suspect the martial temperament, proved lions in the fight. And I knew a timid soul, a little delicate, much given to study and reflection who, after a few months' actual experience of the trenches, became utterly changed. No longer apologising for existence as in the old days, he bore himself proudly in the field, and performed acts of exceptional bravery. Of his civilian friends he asked with strange calm : " Do you know how many Boches I've killed since the war began ? " And in the surprised silence which followed, he gave a tally, which was staggeringly significant.

Apart from the professional pride which dictated an air of gaiety, when a visitor arrived, the occupant of the trench did not in his off moments assume the mien of the troubadour. On the contrary, he looked

grave and serious, and often austere. It was remarkable that when he went to Paris for a few days' relief from the monotony of danger, he found little enjoyment in the old-time pleasures. And those who had been distinguished for a high thoughtlessness, for an abandonment to the Red Gods, proved hardy and virile warriors in the new life, with a speed that astonished all who had not realised the French adaptability. Frivolous in the days before the war, they now adopted an attitude of disapproval and even of positive disgust towards some outward symptoms of the "light heart."

There was not necessarily opposition between "poilu" and "pekin" (as the civilian is amusingly called by the army), but there was, nevertheless, a gulf fixed between the two: the one had seen visions and experienced realities which were denied the other in his peaceful civilian path. It made all the difference in the world. Whatever his sympathy, the civilian brother had not suffered as had the "poilu"; he had been immune from the hourly risk, he had not endured cold and hunger; he had not lain out in the frosty moonlight, in the No Man's Land of the trenches, terribly wounded by one of the murderous engines of war; he had not known the anguish of mind in hospital, the doubt whether the limb could be saved or not, or whether he must go through life halt and maimed. No, for all his sympathy and moral suffering, the civilian had not reached the experiences of the other.

Reflections of this sort no doubt obtruded on the mind of the soldier in his hours of lonely watch. Sometimes, when echoes of the old life were wafted

back to him in the trenches, or when he saw the report in newspapers of some futile discussion in the Chamber, a smile of disdain crossed his lips. Frankly, he was a little tired of this sort of thing. "If the Deputies were here, they would not talk quite so loudly," he reflected with bitterness. And then the headings of another column caught his eye: "Great scandal, a contractor charged with fraud! Huge and hidden profits." "Ah!" he exclaims, and his lips purse again. This time his comments are far severer than against the Parliamentarians. "After all," he says, "those Deputies are paid to talk; it is their business; but the blackguards who make money out of us, out of our lives and limbs——" The phrase is never finished, but the intonation leaves you in no doubt as to the fate of the offenders if they had fallen into his hands. On the following day, perhaps, he sees another scandal of the sort, and now his anger knows no bounds. "What—again? Then they are all at it!" he exclaims. In his excited imagination a considerable part of civilian France is engaged in plundering military France. Happily, there was great exaggeration in his sweeping assumptions. Certainly there were scandals in France during the Great War, as there were scandals elsewhere; but they were few and far between—so few that their rarity magnified their importance.

The soldier's sufferings in the trenches had warped a little his judgment. He was rather hard on others, disregarding their sacrifices and their griefs, none the less real because they had not been exposed to sudden death. The hard work of munition workers turning out shot and shell with ceaseless activity often

escaped him, and if, as might happen, he was deceived in his most intimate affections, and a moral catastrophe awaited him at home, then his cup of bitterness was filled, and in his wrath he declared that all women were faithless and all men perjurers and conspirators against his honour or security. And these were the people for whom he was risking his life and sacrificing his professional prospects !

The close union of every day with men engaged in the strong-hearted and ruthless profession of war was bound to have a reaction upon thoughts and ways of life. In the rude existence of camps, something of the veneer of drawing-rooms disappeared and man returned to primitive directness and simplicity of thought and speech. He became impatient of subtlety and complicated ways, which seemed to him duplicity and the enemy of plain-dealing. A thing must be frank and clear to appeal to him. He had the soldier's disgust of those who whispered in secret in the warmth and shelter whilst he was exposed to the blast. A new temperament was forged in the out-of-doors born of the sun and wind and rain. And the thoughts of those who struggle with the elements and the incredible difficulties of a man-made warfare often take on the rugged character of their surroundings.

Directness of manner and speech are hardly looked for in the traditional French, but war as it is to-day, is no school of politeness, but of vigour and energy. A new *naïveté* accompanied the new strength of soul, and one of its manifestations was an art, which at other moments would have astonished by its crudity

and garishness. It was visible in the shop-windows, where cards showed the soldier in the trench. Above him, in a luminous break in filmy clouds, appeared the vision of the wife and children gathered about the evening lamp. They were thinking obviously of the absent "papa." Maudlin and mawkish though it was, it appealed to the simple soul. Exile from the social round, from the life of affairs, from the frequentation of cafés and theatres in the small country towns, had affected the mentality of the countryman. This incredible existence of the trenches, with its hairbreadth escapes and daily incidents in which life and death played a tragic game of hide-and-seek, developed such essential manliness and such rough and hearty heroism that the mechanism of the mind reverted to the simplest expression. Before the great and serious question of to be or not to be, the minor aspects of life ceased to have importance. A man dying of hunger does not discuss ortolans or peacocks' tongues, nor do the subtleties of sauce appeal to the meatless. And the soldier of France, divorced from his usual pleasures, and being in no mind to complicate existence, turns to the readiest and simplest forms of literary or pictorial expression to satisfy his emotions: it might be the cinematograph behind the lines, it might be the *feuilleton* in the halfpenny paper.

No doubt the mass became infected with the peasant spirit, for peasants formed the bulk of the army, especially when the townsman became the munition-worker. The peasant's mind is both childlike and suspicious, slow to anger, secretive, inclined to deep reflection. He attaches himself slowly, and only

after long proof, to those who win his reluctant confidence, and deeply tenacious are his purposes. He will defend his land to the death; he loves it as he loves liberty. He insists on his independence as he insists upon equality, and only upon that principle will he submit to discipline. Injustice arouses his intense resentment, and General Galliéni's crusade against the shirker found its deepest roots and efficacy in his tacit recognition.

The fact that it was a war to resist invasion made it a holy war, differing intrinsically from a war of aggression, which would never have gained his whole-hearted support. The Great War awakened the old vehemence of the race, which first revealed its astounding power at the battle of Valmy, where the shoeless hosts of the Revolution shook the proudest might of Prussia. That was the birth of the National Army, which, a century and a quarter later, was to come to such extraordinary development. The nation coalesced in 1792 against the foreign tyrant, but that union lacked the complete union of 1914, though it made up in intensity of spirit what it needed in numbers. The Revolution fought for liberty against a caste system; then, as now, the peasant recognised that he was defending his own ground—not the privileges of feudal Europe—and the knowledge made him strong. A man is always formidable in defending his own. In the same way, the French patriot realised that militarism had forced the German to make war upon his peaceful neighbour. In the hospitals I have seen the soldier share with the sick German prisoner dainties that had been brought to him. "Poor devil,

he was forced to fight against us," he would say, showing his realisation of the intimate differences of the two. In *his* case it was a privilege to fight; he was defending his own fields against the hordes; in the other, a blind obedience to the State compelled him to take arm. One was a virtual volunteer in a sacred cause, the other the victim of German Imperialism. It was well to know what one was fighting for, and when one had realised the grandeur of the cause, then heat and cold, mud and rats, and even occasional shortness of rations became of small account. The issue was paramount.

The French soldier was actuated by a deep love of country. In his mortal breast beat the immortal heart of France. When the bugle sounded, as M. Charles Humbert, the Senator Editor has told us, there was a magnificent hastening to the frontier. The fighting souls of the people reappeared, the old memory of struggles was reawakened. "We dreamed of heroic encounters, of brilliant actions, of sublime gestures, of flags conquered in the sun. The reality, alas, was quite otherwise! Rapidly the war became a sad and protracted affair." It became an invisible, scientific, subterranean war of tenacity and endurance, though sometimes blazing into manœuvre battles as at Verdun.

Life, none the less, was not altogether disagreeable behind the lines. There were compensations during the rest moments. Concerts and theatrical representations in which all the stars of the army appeared, men who had been renowned artists "in the civil," made the audience forget the dangers and discomforts of their actual life. And in these *entr'actes* in the

villages, the subject of the war was taboo by a sort of coquetry; one talked of anything else, and occupied one's leisure in acquiring relics from the ruined houses in the devastated villages, or sought, in other ways, to import some variety into the monotony of danger. The concerts revealed the singular talent of the French for improvisation and gave occasion to a latent gaiety, which flickered and flamed into pure joyousness. From the mind in those moments was banished dull care, and badinage became the current coin. Whilst the younger and more vigorous played games, the studious and literary engaged in intellectual exercises. Impressive in their reality are some of the books that have been written at the Front. There is a suggestion of actual experience about them, of *choses vécues*, which one does not feel in second-hand impressions.

Poems, too, flowed from the trenches—not poems, in general, concerned with war, but love and the softer passions. Where war was treated, it was as a mistress, stern and hard to woo. The Great War inspired something of the lyricism that succeeded the Napoleonic era, when de Musset, Hugo, Lamartine, and a pleiades of poets existed. Talent certainly flourished in the trenches. An opera was a proof of it—words and music of such startling excellence that the critics, before whom the work was played, expressed a deep enthusiasm for it. It was reserved for production at the Paris Opera House until the music of the trenches should have given place to the music of peace. Like many a hero in the fight, the author will remain anonymous until the war has ceased to be anything but an ugly

remembrance, and then we shall taste the quality of the composition.

Heroism belongs to no class; it is present in the simple as in the learned, in the rude as in the polished. One of the comforting reflections of the war is that civilisation, in whose name it was waged, is often justified by her children. Civilised man proved his superiority over the savage, and the untutored child of desert and jungle was less master of himself in the dread hour than the finished product of the study and laboratory. That, at least, contains a certain solace more satisfying to human pride than the diabolical inventions of the Germans. Brains triumphed in the direction of battles, and they triumphed in the trenches, where the most cultivated showed the ascendancy of mind over matter. Though the savant and the peasant might be on equal terms of courage, yet it is true that character is the basis of it. And where there were defections from the common bravery, the explanation was in moral failure. A division which broke in the early days of the campaign and retreated some kilometres from the fight, was composed of southern regiments containing, it was said, a large percentage of the flotsam and jetsam of society. And this, it seems, proved that only those can wear the crown of heroism who have borne themselves uprightly.

The schoolmaster has contributed to the spirit of the trenches by his glorious example on the battle-field, if not by his teaching, which was often in a sense opposed to what we term Patriotism. Was he not the arch-antimilitarist? But his intelligence was awakened; he realised what was at stake,

and so he strove to make good that civilisation in the name of which he had taught his beautiful but impracticable theories. All honour to his rapid realisation; all honour to his pupils in the trenches.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### TRENCH JOURNALS AND THEIR READERS

THERE is no better indication of the gaiety and good humour prevailing at the Front than the journals that are circulating in the trenches. I know one charming periodical which was printed within a hundred yards of the German lines, deep down in the earth, in one of those subterranean forts that one imagined impregnable until it was discovered that the Germans, by employing their great guns, could force their way through the soil and attain these defences. The best of the journals that the war has produced on the French side is probably *Rigolboche*, an extremely clever little paper, and yet unpretentious withal, being hand-written and reproduced by a duplicating machine. The letterpress and sketches are really charming, and convey in the most eloquent manner the good temper and high spirits maintained during this protracted war. Even the deadly monotony of the fighting did not damp the artistic ardour of its contributors. Indeed, the pages of many of these jovial little publications prove how indigenous to the soil of France are wit and talent. The wide mobilisation gathers every one into the fold—artist and *littérateur*, artisan and peasant; but the last named, notwithstanding his lack of letters, has qualities of

his own, qualities of soul, and even if he is unable to contribute directly to the trench journal, the little newspaper sparkles with wit which he inspires.

*Rigolboche* has a characteristic sketch. The Kaiser and François Joseph are discovered talking. "My dear François Joseph," remarks the Kaiser, "I think the moment has come to kill the Gallic cock; it is fat and in good condition." He draws his knife, but the cock flies full at his face; at the same time, the British bull-dog gets his teeth into his leg, and the Russian bull, charging up, bears him away on his back.

The "poilu" has given his name to many publications. There is, for instance, the "*Poilu et Marie-Louise*," a title a little obscure, no doubt, to the British reader; but the adjunction of "*Marie-Louise*" signifies that it is associated with officers who left the famous school of St. Cyr in a year when the anniversary of Marie-Louise, Napoleon's Imperial wife, gave its name to the academic year. This organ appears in all the glory of print; but the majority cannot afford this luxury. The *Argonaut* explains its origin, of course, distinctly enough. It is produced in the Argonne. It contains illustrations and letter-press copied by the duplicator. Another has the suggestive name of *La Saucisse*—the popular name of the observation balloon, which directs the fire of the guns. The *Souvenir*, especially to French ears, has a serious sound. Before the war it had a definite military meaning. To-day, as applied to this particular journal, it means an effort to keep green the memory of those who have fallen in the field. Whereas the majority of trench publications give an amusing view of life at the Front, the *Souvenir* strikes the grave note. Its articles are

devoted to cherishing the memory of brave deeds, and of the heroes who performed them—lest we forget. The editor, in an article of considerable charm, quotes the remark of a mutilated soldier to a sympathetic civilian. “Yes, I am the hero to-day,” says the victim of the war, “but a hopeless cripple to-morrow.” A glorious deed may be the work of a moment, but crutches have no apparent glory and endure for a lifetime. There is no halo round the head with sightless eyes; no monument over the little green grave, and society, on the morrow of victory, forgets. And so the poetic and heroic pages of the *Souvenir* are full of the recital of deeds of valour either actual in their happenings or symbolical.

*Le Ver luisant* (“The Glow-worm”) represents quite a different conception of the duty of a trench journal, as does *La Voix du 75* (“The Voice of the 75”). The *Bellica*, the *Boum Voila*, the *Boyau*, the *Canard Poilu*, the *Clarion Territorial*, the *Cri de Guerre*, the *Diable au Cor* (the organ of the 3rd Brigade of the Chasseurs Alpins), the *Écho des Marmites*, the *Écho du grand Couronné*, and the *Écho du 75* are other titles. Cheery productions they are, full of light touches—humour that is not always very refined perhaps, but still humour, among the bursting shells and the agony of death. “Bocheries” is the title of an amusing column in the picturesquely named *Marmite* (the name given to heavy shells), and there is sometimes a light fantastic column of fashions—such, for instance, as the correct way of wearing the respirator, or the *chic* angle to tilt the steel helmet.

The British trench newspapers have also their particular charm—intermingling Tommy’s robust

cheerfulness with the shy pathos of homesick islanders, but printed on fine paper, in good type, they lack a little the winsome appeal of those tiny hand-written sheets, sometimes no bigger than a sheet of foolscap, that are produced in the very atmosphere of war, and which are nearly always dainty, and represent in some subtle way the aroma of France: the wit and tenderness, the heroism, the grand virtues of the fighting man, and yet his simplicity of soul. Obviously, they have been born in war, and yet unaffected by the crash of metal, the horrid jar and thud of falling earth, the ruin of defences, the crashing, crazy effects of heavy fire.

Here is another paper bearing the title of *La Félix Potinière*. Every one who has kept house in Paris knows that "Félix Potin" is the name of a large provision stores; but the word *potin* is the slang term for a piece of gossip, and gossip indeed are the contents of this amusing little sheet. What tranquillity of mind is revealed by these jokes and *jeux d'esprit*; one would imagine the Boches were many miles off instead of just round the corner! and, moreover, these stimulators to gaiety have the professional touch: the cuisine is perfect; the man of the *métier* has been at work, and "news," with its accompanying comment, is served up with *sauce piquante*. *La Guerre Joviale* does not belie its excellent title; it shows us war under its most agreeable aspect; at least it is heartening if not strictly true. And *L'Indiscret des Poilus*, the *Lapin à plume* ("The Feathered Rabbit") and *Notre Rire* (the organ of the artillery) are brimful of laughter and the joy of living, even though sometimes, in their surroundings, there is

little laughter, a festival of Death rather than of Life.

Another "poilu," a very curious sort of fellow, comes from the Champagne district, and yet another from Verdun, smoking hot with battle. One can imagine the editor inditing his poems and dishing up his article—one can almost see him doing it—with an aerial torpedo sailing overhead and all sorts of death-dealing engines threatening his plant down in the deep-sunk chamber where the joyous little herald blows his blast of good hope and perseverance to the soldiers of its circulation. These are real examples of the indomitable will of France in the most tremendous episode of her existence, hardly excepting the Revolution—for the War of '70 sinks into utter insignificance before this vast and world-wide upheaval. There is no mistaking the gay insouciant character, though sometimes the effort to cheer may go a little beyond the strict requirements. Nevertheless, these little papers are barometers of the fighting spirit of France. It is not strange to find this fighting spirit so keenly developed in the first-line trenches, for here it was tuned to the highest pitch by reason of the stress of circumstances, by reason of the close proximity of danger, by the very intoxication of that danger, and by the common spirit of heroism that comes from close comradeship; but it is significant that the same spirit existed at the rear where men were awaiting their turn for battle—the sort of waiting that is the severest test for nerves; and it is as symbols of this splendid and invincible spirit that these charming little documents have their greatest psychological importance.

In glancing through the collection of M. de la Roncière, Keeper of the Printed Books at the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris, one is particularly impressed by the spirit of fraternity that pervades the trench newspaper, evidence of the thoroughly democratic army of France. No journal prides itself as being the organ of a "crack" regiment. There are, in fact, no *corps d'élite*—corps that are specially recruited. In the Republican model army each regiment is placed on a footing of equality, and the tendency in all records of achievements is to keep a strict balance and to give no more glory to one unit than another. None the less, certain regiments have perforce distinguished themselves in spite of this arrangement. They have distinguished themselves because they have been in the forefront of the fighting, because they have borne the brunt of dangerous enterprises, because they have persisted in keeping alive the old traditions of the corps, traditions which arose from the fact that the men forming it came from a certain district renowned for its hardy types, and capable of an endless energy of resistance. Such a regiment is the "Chasseurs à Pied," the most famous corps of the Home Army, and popularly known as the "Chasseurs Alpins." For although the Chasseurs were used all along the eastern frontier from Belfort to Luneville, the popular mind constantly associates them with the mountains—the little thick-set men in dark blue tunics and blue Tam-o'-Shanters, skimming over the snow upon skis. These are men of the Alps and the Vosges, sturdy of limb and sound of wind, real mountaineers, courageous, resourceful and capable of endless fatigue. No unit of the French Army has

suffered as much as they in proportion to their numbers. They have been everywhere where the fighting was most severe, and at Verdun they took a foremost part in resisting the colossal attack of the Germans. Although there was a Chasseur regiment under the Empire, dressed very much as were the Grenadiers, with a high fur bonnet, in their present form the corps is of comparatively recent date, and has existed only three-quarters of a century; the regimental records, however, hold some well-known names. President Poincaré performed his military service in this famous corps, Bar-le-Duc being his recruiting centre, and among its officers were both Canrobert and MacMahon, the one commanding the fifth and the other the eighth battalion.

The Great War effected changes in the traditional uniform of the Chasseurs. Though they kept their dark clothes out of pride of family whilst the rest of the army—except the Moroccans, who were in khaki—adopted the horizon blue, the famous blue *béret* (Tam-o'-Shanter) embroidered with a golden bugle was sacrificed for the steel helmet, at least for service in the trenches—that valuable head-gear which has saved probably fifty per cent. of head wounds.

One of the most picturesque elements of the French army are the Zouaves, with their blue embroidered tunic and vest and the baggy red trousers reaching to the knee, the whole surmounted by the fez. Of this gorgeous uniform the only survival of the war, alas, was the fez! The blue tunic was changed to a khaki coat, the voluminous trousers copied from the old Turkish garb became merely baggy khaki

breeches. *Sic transit gloria mundi!* But if the Zouaves were deprived of their brilliant plumage, they made up for it in glory of achievement. Largely employed in storming-parties, the Germans learnt to fear the Zouaves more than any other troops, so reckless were they in their bravery and their utter disregard of desperate odds. The corps dates from the early days of Algeria, and was created in 1831, when two battalions were formed, receiving the name of "Zouaves" from the Arab *Zouaoua*, a fierce and intractable tribe of Kabyle, the best fighters of Northern Africa. The Zouaves were recruited originally from the Kabyles and Arabs of Algeria and also, a curious feature, from the hot bloods of the Paris population—an element that was introduced, because it was thought advisable to dilute the number of natives by Europeans. The blend was admirable, and the new troops performed marvels of dash and daring in those days, just after the July Revolution of 1830, when France was not sure whether she wanted her new colonies or not, and left to the Algerian administration the onus of consolidating the nominal conquest and pacifying and developing the country. One of the early commanders of the corps was de Lamorcière, a bold and dashing officer, with more than a touch of eccentricity in his composition. He spoke all the Arabian dialects perfectly, and indeed was an ideal leader for such a corps of dare-devils.

The Zouaves hold many distinguished records in French history. Under Marshal MacMahon they fought at Malakoff and Sebastopol, and the Third Zouaves went into action under the eyes of Victor Emmanuel, taking a prominent part in the capture of

the bridge at Palestro, marking the victory of the French and Piedmontese over the Austrians.

The formation of the Zouaves led to the establishment of other native or semi-native corps, notably the *Tirailleurs Algériens*. Since that day the conquest of Morocco has added other elements to the native army; and, particularly in the early days of the war, the French populations in the region of the Front were interested to see the picturesque figures of the *Spahis*, or native Moroccan cavalry, in their robes and turbans, sitting superbly their swift and strong little horses.

Later, however, the native element (which could not overcome its fear and repugnance to cannon) was largely eliminated, and the Zouaves, greatly increased from their original numbers, were mainly composed of colonials of French parentage.

But perhaps the most interesting regiment from the psychological point of view—the regiment that teems with romance and holds thousands of secrets in its ranks—is the famous Foreign Legion. Under Napoleon I the Foreign Legion existed side by side with distinctly national regiments, such as the Portuguese, the Dutch, and even the German regiments. But under Louis Philippe the two regiments that were the original force became definitely formed into a Foreign Legion. The sphere of the Foreign Legion was mainly Africa, for owing to its mixed nationality, resulting in a large diversity of sympathy, it was deemed unsuitable for European warfare. True, it was actively employed in the Crimea, and also earlier against the Carlists in Spain; but during the Crimean War there was a certain amount of desertion

by elements of the corps that had Slav sympathies. Hence the Foreign Legion was mainly employed in tribal warfare, and Africa was its recognised home. Strangely diverse were its ranks—the Paris hooligan, the swindling banker, unfrocked bishops, aristocrats who had dragged their names into the dust, the discredited politician. Of the Legionaries no questions are asked, and the pseudonyms they adopt often cover the once famous names of men who have “disappeared.” Rumour credits the corps with many strange tales, but it is undoubtedly true that an authentic German princeling fought with the Legion until the opening of the war, when he crossed over to Germany and used his local knowledge to great effect against his quondam friends.

At the beginning of the war the ranks of the Foreign Legion were swelled to a vast extent by the stream of volunteers of all nationalities who loved France and rushed to her succour. There were Italians, Belgians, Greeks, English, Americans, who were anxious to take up arms for the invaded country. Poles, Russians, Croates, Slovanes, Serbs, Finns, Montenegrins, and Tcheques joined. Some came to France from the uttermost ends of the earth to offer their services: Peruvians, Swiss, Argentines, Norwegians. There were German Poles and Danes from Sleswig-Holstein, Spaniards, Galicians, and Italians from the Trentino, and ten thousand Alsatians, German subjects, who had escaped. There were thus available 35,000 men, a veritable army corps. This was the figure, in spite of the rejection of a great number by the recruiting board at the Invalides. They all left for their dépôts four days later. These

volunteers were of all ages and of all nationalities—boys of eighteen, and mature men of fifty and even more; Polish miners from the north of France; Kabyle workmen from factories in the Seine et Oise; Russian artists, international boxers (including a negro champion), famous trick cyclists, and jockeys, who had often worn winning colours at Longchamp and Auteuil. Alec Carter the well-known jockey was killed. There were also young artists from various nations at the École des Beaux Arts. Prominent writers and artists, a son of Maxime Gorki, and several quite well-known poets from Central America; the son of the Russian ambassador, M. Iswolsky, and a famous *pelota* player, Pablo Irraguerro.

The regiment has fought splendidly at the Front, partaking all the sufferings of the soldiers, all their danger and their glory too. The force has been employed in all the grand *coups de chien*. There was the spirited address of a Captain who read out the order of the General, and then said, “Mes Enfants, we have the honour of attacking the first. Pay no heed to those who fall. If I go down, leave me; push on without thinking of anything else.” Some sang the *Marseillaise* and others their national hymns. Their conduct on that great day was sublime. They rushed fearlessly forward under the storm of shell, bayonets glittering in the sunshine of an early May morning. Nothing stops the formidable advance. They swarm over the parapet; the course commences. Their orders were to carry Hill 140, and they fulfilled their instructions. The Polish Legion was extraordinarily brave, and it saw fall at its head, brandishing the colours, Ladislas de Szuynski, son of the

celebrated Polish historian. Concerning the Polish Legion there is the pretty story of a Pole who, wishing to discover whether there were Poles among the enemy, crawled on his stomach in the night to the German trenches. Once arrived there, he sang, very quietly, an old Polish song. Surprised, the German Poles lifted their heads, observed the bold singer, and allowed themselves to forget the horrors of war. When he had finished the listeners began to talk about Poland, that the Prussian kept underfoot. A Pole surely should not fight against France, who fights for Poland, insinuated the emissary. There was another song, and then, under the enchantment of the old memories, the Poles allowed themselves to be persuaded and carried over to the French trenches.

One of the principal elements of the new Foreign Legion were the Garibaldians, who showed immense fervour. They formed a part of the 10th Division under General Gouraud in the Argonne, and with them were the six grandsons of Garibaldi. Their tactics were extraordinarily impetuous, and in a three-days' fight they lost 800 men. The special corps into which they were formed was disbanded on Italy's declaration against Austria, but their valour had been such that Joffre expressed his sense of honour in commanding them.

Wherever it has fought, whether to-day or yesterday, the Foreign Legion has always left a record of valour, daring and devilry. An amusing story is recalled from Crimean days, when Canrobert stopped in front of a Legionary and asked him what sort of shoes he was wearing? Strange shoes indeed! for he had blackened his feet, having sold his boots for

*eau de vie*. But episodes such as this are ever typical of a corps that sells its shoes for a little brandy, and its life for a spice of glory.

The colonial troops of the French Army were called, until a few years ago, Marine Infantry, and were attached directly to the Navy. Nowadays the system adopted is that of some regiments in the British Army; that is to say, one battalion remains at home whilst the other battalions serve in the colonies. They wear a dark blue uniform with yellow epaulettes. During the course of the war their composition became very mixed, and negroes and tribesmen from the Soudan were embodied with them. In this case also the colonial troops are perhaps less adapted to European warfare than they are to their own special field of action in the colonies against insurrectionary tribes.

A very fine corps, which covered itself with glory at Dixmude, is the Marine Fusiliers. The force retreated to Dixmude when their original mission, which was to defend Antwerp, failed, owing to the collapse of the Belgian defence. Here they held their ground with the greatest heroism for over a month, though the original plan was that they should be relieved in a few hours, and at this spot a peculiarly tragic incident took place. A second in command, a naval captain, Janiaud, went up to take the surrender of two German companies of infantry, which were surrounded by the Marines. The Germans seized the captain and kept him prisoner. The Fusiliers then opened fire, which was briskly returned by the Germans, but during the short engagement which ended in the capitulation of the enemy force,

the captain was shot dead by two German officers with their revolvers. After this act of treachery, which took place in November 1914, the Marine Fusiliers swore to take no further prisoners, a resolution to which they have rigorously held in their various engagements ever since.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE AIRMAN IN WAR

“AH, monsieur, you fly like a bird!” said an admirer one day to Pégoud.

“A bird!” was the famous reply, “*Les oiseaux ne savent pas voler!*” (“The birds don’t know how to fly!”) And indeed the bird-man, soaring at immense height and incredible speed, has left the little denizen of the air far behind. The wings of the machine are rigid, it is true, but also they are tireless; and the skill of the inventor and science of the mathematician have excelled the pulsing wings of flesh and feather. A few years back—ten years ago to be exact—the birds must have tittered as they watched at Bagatelle the fearsome efforts of the ugly ducklings of the early days of aviation. On November 13, 1906, a famous date in the history of flying, Santos Dumont flew 220 metres in twenty-one seconds, that is, at the rate of nearly thirty-eight kilometers an hour. He had won the prize of the Aero Club for a hundred meters in a straight line. The experiments began at ten in the morning, but the test was not accomplished until late in the afternoon. Two enormous birds spreading their white wings of canvas—the one belonging to Santos Dumont and the other to Blériot—lay upon the green carpet of

the ground. A crowd of enthusiasts, amongst whom were some of the great names in aeronautics, such as M. Archdeacon, the Marquis de Dion, Surcouf, Louis Renault and M. Besançon, were upon the ground surrounding the two pioneers and eagerly discussing the theories of lighter than air and heavier than air—that is, the bag filled with hydrogen that floated in air, or the aeroplane which flew by its own means of engine and wings. The machine of Santos Dumont was a weird-looking thing. Some compared it with an ibis or heron as it rose into the air with its long neck outstretched and its wings spread—a strange thing like an antediluvian bird. Its planes were formed of canvas frames divided into cubes, so that at one angle it looked like a flying cupboard. The square box-like head in front was the steering apparatus. The tail of the beast was represented by the screw continually lashing its way through the air. The pioneer sat in a little cage arrangement between the planes, so that his head and body emerged and he had the appearance of riding astride. The first starts were a little unpromising. The machine rose a few inches, and then a few yards, and came to earth abruptly in each case. In three separate attempts it flew one hundred and fifty yards in all, achieving, in the third attempt, eighty yards in seven seconds. But it was not until the light was failing that the machine really rose to any height. It then flew at six metres from the ground at a tremendous rate. The airman, however, was forced to descend for fear of an accident to the crowd, which was following his movements with impassioned interest. He had won the prize of the Aero Club for sustained flight, an advance, at any rate, upon

the series of leaps in the air which had passed for flight before that. It was said that the Wright brothers had flown twenty-five miles; but that was in America, and, besides, the Parisians were not very sure about it; but here in France it was the first time that mortal man had flown over the heads of humanity by mechanical means. The Blériot-Voisin machine, though very ingenious in its construction, did not succeed that day; Santos Dumont, the little plucky Brazilian, was the real conqueror: future laurels were being reserved for M. Blériot. The French, indeed, have pioneered in the air. The brothers Montgolfier were the first to make ascents in their balloon; and the balloon originally appeared as a military engine for observation above the battle-field of Fleurus, where the Revolutionary General Jourdan vanquished the Austrians in 1794. The dirigible is also largely the product of French invention.

One of the amazing features of the war was the rapid development of aviation after the outbreak of hostilities. In a few months only the aeroplane emerged from its experimental stage and appeared as a highly finished and accurate instrument of war. An immense stride was attained when the machine was first adapted by the French to carry cannon, which enabled the attack upon another aeroplane to be made in the horizontal plane instead of vertically, as was necessary when one machine had to mount above another in order to drop bombs or *flèches*—one of those refinements of cruelty which the present war has produced. Incidentally, there are some who say that the German *flèches*, launched from the skies, were of such inferior steel

that they buckled up when they touched a hard object. However that may be (and we have no reason to complain of such an arrangement), weight, whether in the form of cannon or other armaments, was constantly added to the aeroplane, and the problem then arose as to the maintenance of speed. In the aerial machine, speed is the first requisite, especially nowadays when it is necessary to mount and mount, perhaps, to six thousand yards to overfly the enemy craft, be he Zeppelin or fellow airman. And a few minutes make all the difference—the difference of kilometers—in the pursuit; thus speed must always be combined with those offensive properties that are being gradually added to the battle-plane.

And a third difficulty was that of starting the machine quickly in pursuit of an enemy travelling at the great heights that are now customary—and indeed obligatory—with the development of anti-aircraft artillery. Naturally the machine even of the speedier sort loses time as it mounts spirally or in a series of inclined planes to give battles to the Zeppelin or Fokker. Would it be possible to turn the observation balloon into a sort of perch for the airman, so that he would be suspended always midway between earth and sky ready instantly (if one may suppose him able to detach himself) to fly away in pursuit of the stranger? Yet in the present stage of development such a desideratum is difficult of realisation. The airman must start from the ground or return to it every time he wants to overhaul his engine or replenish his reservoirs. That is his touch with solid realities: otherwise one might suppose him flying for days, never setting foot to

earth, the modern Guardian Angel, hovering eternally in the heavens.

The aeroplane has completely revolutionised warfare, inasmuch as it has deprived strategy of its chief weapon—surprise. As the eyes of the army the aeroplane played its most important rôle. A light and very speedy machine is the scout, and it is his duty to make reconnaissances, report upon gun emplacements, the numbers of the opposing troops, the movements of the enemy, and the disposition of his trenches. But the aeroplanes used in warfare are not all alike. The tendency is towards differentiation, and while the scout is swift and light, the battle-plane is extremely powerful and heavily armed with cannon or machine-guns, sometimes also carrying a spur for ramming enemy craft; and again there is a third type of machine armed also for defence, but adapted principally to range-finding, and fitted with signalling and photographic apparatus; it hovers continually over the enemy lines directing artillery fire. None of the offices of the aeroplane proved more valuable than that of giving the range of enemy positions to one's own artillery, and then registering the shots, marking where they fell too short, or overpassed the mark. This is one of the most dangerous as well as the most useful of the services rendered by the man-bird. It requires great nerve, judgment, and coolness on the part of the aviator, for he must hang over the enemy trenches and expose himself to the fire of their anti-aircraft guns, the efficacy of which made rapid strides as the war progressed. The German method of signalling to the opposing batteries by means of smoke bombs with different-coloured fuses was soon im-

proved upon by the French, who used wireless telegraphy and the heliograph by day. But the rôle of the aeroplane is not confined even to these important services. It becomes at times the instrument of aerial bombardment for the destruction of fortified places, military stores, railway junctions, dirigible sheds, encampments, bridges, and roads used by the military. When war broke out, the French airmen received explicit instructions not to bombard any town for fear of inflicting harm upon civilians, but the Germans were not so scrupulous, and their defiance of the dictates of humanity forced a change in the policy of their Allies, if only in self-defence.

The aeroplane could be used also as a link for communicating with armies and their staffs, particularly in the case of a besieged army or town. And, finally, the man-bird is admirable in the capacity of aerial policeman; he can watch the clouds and he can prevent the passage of the enemy pilots. Not that it is possible to suppose that one force of aeroplanes, however numerous, can completely occupy the heavens, for the skies are broad; but bold aviators ever on the watch, patrolling the sky in constant relays (as was the case in the aerial defence of Paris against the Zeppelins), will generally succeed, whatever measures are taken against them, in overtopping the adversary; and the French aviator is remarkably good in that sort of warfare where native audacity and resource are in demand—that is why the Frenchman is so superb a performer in the air. None the less it is impossible quite to bar out the enemy. The clouds may always hide a foe; the fog is ever the possible lurking ground of the hostile airship. But although the barrage system (so successfully applied

on solid earth in the *tir de barrage*) cannot absolutely prevent a Zeppelin attack upon a wide-spreading town, yet the aerial dam has given good results in the war of the air. The procedure is to institute a barrage of aeroplanes over against a certain locality—a certain restricted space. The enemy is marked down and prevented from passing. Undesirable visitors are invited to “move on,” and they do not wait for a repetition of the request! I have heard of one hardy airman who, charged to watch the heavens against the passage of the adversary, so manœuvred that the thick heavy clouds which hung in the sky were positively useful to him as a screen. Noting that at one point there was a clear space in the dense curtain of fog, he placed himself there and watched as a look-out might in the embrasure of a fort. None came to challenge his vigilance.

Again the barrage tactics are extremely useful in the prevention of secrets being divulged to the enemy. Certain important movements, such as the moving up of reinforcements, are taking place in a certain part of the line, and to keep the enemy from knowledge of the fact *squadrigas* of battle-planes are sent up to bar the way to the enemy scouts, and nothing can penetrate the screen of the *avions*. Thus it has so happened that, thanks to the barrage system, the enemy has been without definite news of the Allies' movements during twenty-four hours. But let it be remembered that the aerial dam implies the mastery of the air, as important to the Allies as the mastery of the seas: indeed, one could establish a very close analogy between the two. The mastery of the air—the complete mastery—would have meant the finish of the war, the absolute victory for that

side which possessed it. And the aerial fleet must consist of aeroplanes, not Zeppelins. For after all the Zeppelins failed miserably either in their bombardment of England or their assault upon French towns. True they have taken toll of a certain number of innocent lives in England, but an infinitesimal number in comparison with the holocaust caused by a terrestrial bombardment. Cumbersome, unwieldy, unable to operate except in a fog, the Zeppelin was comparatively ineffectual as an engine of war, and would not have been employed by the Germans except to prevent the public exposure of a mistaken policy. Six aeroplanes could effect more damage than one Zeppelin, whose radius of action is circumscribed by the fact that it has to carry vast weight for a long journey, that it is expensive to build, and consumes immense quantities of fuel *en route*; that it is almost as dangerous to itself as to the enemy on account of its vulnerability from cannon and from high winds, and moreover it is constantly exposed to attack from the upper strata of air by the aeroplane which swoops down upon it with the speed of the eagle, and against which the Zeppelin has no defence. No, it is the aeroplane that has come to stay, and a very prominent airman—a man who bears a household name in aeronautics—declared to me that the side which could furnish ten thousand aeroplanes with the airmen to mount them would win the war. For if aerial bombardment had, up to that moment, taken very little place in the hostilities it was because it was on so small a scale. Very little effect was to be obtained by sending half a dozen apparati over a town—it is true that in some of the French raids over German

towns there were as many as thirty machines employed, but this was the great exception. It is easy to conjure up the effect of a gigantic bombardment—a shower of metal from the sky—rained everywhere upon the enemy troops on the march, upon the enemy convoys in the rear, upon his stores and magazines, upon his bridges and railways. Such a bombardment, if it could be continued systematically for long enough, would mean his forced surrender, for retreat would not save him. His aerial foes would be always quicker than he, even his quickest motor transport, and would bombard him from the skies. So that the mastery of the sky would ensure the victory for any army.

The development of the aeroplane is full of the most startling possibilities. Already it has far outflown the vision of its inventors, for, a very short time ago it seems, one of the Voisin *frères* declared to me that the aeroplane would never be other than a rich man's hobby, of little use in war-time other than the dropping of a few explosives. My informant has since trodden the path of so many brave pilots, but had he lived he would have admitted to-day that the possibilities of the aeroplane seem limitless. The appearance of the Sikorski machine in Russia carrying five or six men in its cabin encourages the belief that the aerobus will soon be a practical reality, and the imagination is fired by the prospect of the air humming with giant aeroplanes, which, by the way, the Germans also attempted to use during the war. There is more than a possibility—so many surprising things have happened—that, in the future, commanders will have aerial motor lorries at their disposal for the rapid trans-

port of their troops. Thus strategy and the physiognomy of the fight would be completely changed. It would effect a complete metamorphosis. The commander who possessed this aerial fleet would be able to carry the whole of his army with the speed and ease of the magic carpet of the *Arabian Nights* to some distant point and descend even into the enemy country. Nevertheless, as M. Blanchon in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* suggests, the General who resorted to these aerial methods could not carry out normal military operations for the reason that his *matériel* must go by road. But when the science of air-transport is sufficiently advanced to allow armies to pass in the sky, presumably that army will know how to take care of its lines of communication.

These are dreams of the future, however, and their realisation is problematical. But the vision which is in no wise uncertain—the vision which will be realised in the near future, is that of vast armies of wings gathered in the sky. Nations will no longer possess fleets of hundreds of aeroplanes, but tens of thousands will lie in readiness to skim into enemy country and scatter terror and death over vast areas. The nations that plunge into war will no longer pledge only their fighting men; they will enter into battle knowing that their women and children must also endure the worst agony of horror, for modern science has destroyed civilised warfare, and modern man has joined hands with primitive man and wars upon the innocent and helpless.

But it must be conceded that superiority in the machines should be accompanied by superiority in pilots. In a conversation which I had at the time of writing this chapter with M. Louis Blériot (who

knows as much as any man living of the practical side of aviation and even its scientific side), the famous winner of the cross-Channel prize confessed that France had not sufficiently developed her rich treasure in expert and adventurous men—the very pick of the pilots of the world—though the English, too, were extraordinary for their *sang-froid* and were remarkable airmen. For in the air as on the land, in the last resort, it is the personal element which tells. A school, urged Blériot, was necessary to form such super-pilots as Garros and Pégoud, men renowned for ever for their prowess in the air.

For the conquest of the air is to the swift and strong and fearless. Prudence and sagacity, and the slow measured wisdom that comes with the years, play no part in so breathless a pursuit. It is a game for young gods, not for the pale *savant*; a sport for young eagles, for a man must be sharp of eye, strong of claw and sinews to cleave his way through the clouds, right into the face of day. These super-men who ride fearlessly amongst the stars must be the very pick of humanity, revelling in the sensations of supreme danger, glorying in the knowledge that in a few seconds an assailant may emerge from yonder cloud with whom he must come into death grapples, and well aware that the vanquished will crash down thousands of feet to earth. Youth: youth has been poured out with a lavish hand on the smoking, bloody altar of the war. Youth: there is no incense more precious to the gods. Alas! a monstrous sort of selection is exercised. The young are mowed down by Death with the scythe, leaving the least adventurous, the timid and calculating—

those who are sure eventually to die of a cold in the head—to live on.

Very curious is the psychology of the airman. He is billeted so often in the midst of the world in some pleasant little town away behind the lines—it may be even Paris; sometimes also Fate sends him to a château where he lives like a prince amid ancestral halls and a sweeping park—until the day when duty calls him to mount the perilous stairway of the skies to give mortal combat to the enemy. In the trenches men welcome an attack as a relief from the deadly monotony of life in pits, but the airman leaves an easeful, agreeable, social life for the cold, austere atmosphere of the skies under the pure radiant dome of heaven. It requires a man of special temperament to withstand so lively a contrast—not to be softened or unnerved by it. Think of the solitude of the upper air, careering absolutely alone, perhaps. And there is no turning back. There is no such word as “funk” in the bright lexicon of the airman. He is up there because he is fearless, because he does not dread being solus in the wide heavens, because he is a man and no craven, because he has nerves of steel and whipcord. And he must be ready to fight with any weapons. Garros was equally expert in attacking and bringing down his man with machine-gun, carbine, rifle, or even revolver, and in ten days before he was captured he had “grassed” three German aeroplanes. One of the men who fell into his hands having asked him to announce his capture to the German lines, Garros started off in that spirit of chivalry common amongst airmen. There is this delightful about the new arm, it has given a touch of romance to the drab horror of the war. Whenever

a man was captured or killed, airmen from the opposite camp dropped a letter informing the comrades of the victim, often with an added word of praise. "Even the Germans are gentlemen in the air," remarked a young pilot the other day. There is chivalry in the air. The man with his head near the stars, flying in immeasurable space, has no room for littlenesses. His heart is large and splendid like the splendour of his deeds—deeds that make the exploits of the old heroes pale into insignificance. They are the phenomenal fruit of a limitless audacity, of a glorious and spring-like youth, of the heyday of existence, when danger is the mad intoxicant, the heady draught that puts brightness into the eye, that gives a riotous pleasure to life, that is like song and wine to the hero clad in the shining and invincible armour of his own superlative freshness and illusions.

The bodies that crash down from the heavens and the souls that soar into the white radiance of Eternity have known no petty thought, have perpetrated no mean deed. Yes, there is chivalry in the Air.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE “ POILU’S ” HOSPITAL

THERE is this wonderful and alluring in France, that, recognising the faults in an administration or department of the public service, she sets to work immediately to effect reform. And it was clear enough that the *service de santé*, or hospital service, was grievously defective at the outbreak of the war. It was a question that had never been properly worked out. Those who had thought about the subject at all, never supposed that the demands upon the department would be so terrific. Probably they thought, as did most Frenchmen, that the war would be of quick duration and that—well—the inconveniences of the system would be but temporary, and one would do the best one could in so short a time. But the actual facts were to give the lie to this prevision as to many others. The war lasted long, the demands upon the hospital were not only terrific but protracted. But with the spirit of adaptability, of which the French have given so many proofs during the war, they set to work with the resolution to do the best possible. Little by little the gross defects of the earlier days were remedied; the number of doctors, which at the beginning had been hopelessly inadequate, was augmented, and immense improvements were made in the organisation of the

hospital trains. Thereupon the evacuation of the wounded developed on scientifically humane lines, in spite of the difficulties of an unexpected kind, mainly brought about by the colossal character of the war. Thus the wounded rapidly received attention in the ambulances and were quickly sent away in trains and motor-cars, and reached the most distant parts of France not later than the morrow of the combat. I was at Biarritz when the Champagne offensive was taking place, and saw arrive at the station wounded men, still powdered with the dust of the trenches, who had been in the fight twenty-four hours before.

The hospitals, however, even the most modern in their equipment, did not equal the English, still less the American, but the reason was not far to seek: a lack of money. A great many "sanitary formations" (as they are called in France) suffered also from a want of motors; in fact the French, by the very nature of the circumstances, had not the immense resources that the English possess. English newspapers raised immense sums for the care of the sick. But if the French had not the money to devote to the niceties of hospital installation they did the best they could with the time and means at their disposal. And although, perhaps, the hospitals were not as clean as would satisfy English tastes, they served their purpose, which was to restore as many men as possible to the firing-line and alleviate suffering.

Eternally to their credit is the manner in which the French resolutely set their house in order after the failure of the system was revealed on the field of battle. It must be remembered that the long duration of battles nowadays prevents the wounded from

being removed at once, and often they have to remain the whole of the day where they have fallen until the night comes and they can be transported. Naturally it is of high importance in the saving of life that the wounded should be got away as quickly as possible to avoid the setting in of gangrene.

The Committee, which was formed by M. Millerand at the Ministry of War in the early days of hostilities, to effect reforms in the army medical service, fixed the number of sixty motor-cars per army corps. This number was in direct relation with the accommodation of the hospital trains. But when the war took on the character of a war of manœuvres it became necessary to employ trains used for ammunition and even for food supply—returning empty to their base—for the evacuation of the wounded. In a general fashion it may be said that the great pre-occupation of the military command is to transport the wounded away from the scene of action as rapidly as possible in order to remain unhampered. One could draw a melancholy picture of the first victims of the war and its shambles being sent right across France in crawling trains—the word is applicable in a double sense, a long-drawn-out agony—before the arrival at the base hospital. Never shall I forget the first trainful of British wounded I encountered coming from Mons. The goods train, without seats, benches or beds, crawled and jolted by, passing my train going in the opposite direction. We shouted words of cheer, to which many of the Tommies replied, gaily enough. Some even jumped off the creeping train to pick up the fruit we threw (one fellow, I remember, with a bandaged leg, hopped on one foot in the permanent way, determined not

to lose a pear that had fallen there). But others, again, made no reply, and we hushed our voices and bowed our heads as we saw recumbent figures, stretched in cattle trucks on bundles of straw, figures that gave no sign. Would they ever speak again, these men lying alone, untended, in the creaking, jarring train? But these terrible conditions were quickly changed. At the beginning of the war there were only five regular hospital trains provided with beds for the wounded, and a hundred improvised trains, formed to a large extent of the rolling stock of goods trains. The wounded could not be properly attended in such trains, because there was a lack of communication between the different parts, but afterwards, corridor trains were adopted almost exclusively. Nevertheless the number of the wounded was so great, after some of the battles, that every sort of train possible and imaginable had to be pressed into the service. But the Committee, by its wise and careful dispositions, rendered a great service in providing train accommodation for sixty thousand wounded to which the Minister of War added twenty thousand; and which again, I believe, was considerably increased by General Galliéni during his brief but strenuous period at the Ministry of War.

As originally conceived the ambulance of the Front was equipped for major operations as well as the hospital in the rear, but afterwards it was found inadvisable to perform operations in these conditions where the surgeon had not the time or the tranquillity of mind necessary for the purpose; and so by a later arrangement the hospitals for the major operations were placed fifteen or twenty miles to the rear. And so it happened that the first mistakes were

rectified. Instead of great and important operations being conducted on the field of battle, subject to the dangers and interruptions from such a propinquity, the more gravely wounded, whose state required amputation, were rapidly transported to these hospitals in the rear after their wounds had been attended to in the first place, and an examination made in the field hospital, or ambulances as they are called in France. This system gave much better results than that adopted in the beginning, whereby the *ambulances de l'avant* (or advanced ambulances) and the reserve ambulances, the divisional ambulances, and the army ambulances, were interchangeable. They were intended to serve for all the purposes of attending to the wounded. They were used either as a place of temporary relief for the wounded or took on a *quasi* permanent character according to the necessities of the case. When the advanced ambulances in certain circumstances became stationary, the reserve ambulances followed the army on the march. It seemed in many respects an excellent system, and certainly was very supple and ingenious, for these ambulances became interchangeable; but they possessed the inconvenience, to which I have already alluded—that is to say, the proper sort of attention could not be given to the important cases. Hence the change that the Committee brought about, whereby the *grands blessés* were transported to the hospital at the rear, where the necessary skill and the instruments required were at their disposal. The present system works in this manner. The battle takes place. The chief medical officer fixes the spot in the rear where the formation ought to be established. The formation establishes itself

there in a couple of hours with its motor-cars. An hour after, it has pitched its first tent and is ready to shelter the first wounded which come to it from the ambulances, perhaps in the space of three or four hours. Instruments sterilised in advance permit the surgeons to commence to operate three hours after having received their orders to establish the hospital tent. Other tents can be established to the number of five. A hundred wounded persons can thus be taken care of and treated in the open country. Reserve ambulances can be called upon in case of need. As soon as operated upon, and out of immediate danger, the wounded, in the majority of cases, can be evacuated to permanent hospitals further back in the rear.

In case of retreat, the formation, if warned in time, falls back carrying with it if possible all the wounded and follows the troops. These tent hospitals carry with them the wherewithal to instal an operating theatre and a *section d'hospitalisation*, composed of a hundred beds, five double-walled tents, and the necessary doctors and male attendants. Of course the problem of removing the wounded from these tent hospitals at the Front is always a grave one. When the war took on the character of a siege war, a train acted as a sort of shuttle from the field ambulances to the station where the "army zone" finished and the "interior zone" began. The two were generally seventy or eighty miles apart. Here the wounded were carried to the other train, where the cases were sorted out and sent to the distant base hospitals. But, as I have said, the tendency was to keep the slight cases as near as possible to the lines, and send only to distant parts either medical cases—

infectious diseases, and convalescents—or the more serious surgical cases, which were entering upon a secondary phase.

One of the most interesting aspects of the question of the treatment and recovery of the wounded was the utilisation of the mineral waters which exist in such abundance in France, particularly in the Pyrenees; and all the well-known stations of this delightful region were filled with soldiers recovering from their wounds or illnesses incurred in the service of the country. Magnificent results were obtained also by the same means in '70. Strongly impregnated sulphur waters gave then, as they have given during this second war, most admirable results, particularly in combating the infection of wounds caused by fire-arms. It is not necessary to insist upon the dreadful error of the theory that bullet wounds were clean wounds. Before it was discovered that the bullet infected the surrounding tissue much harm had been done. The mineral waters were also invaluable in the treatment of nervous affections arising from wounds and rheumatism contracted in the trenches. Some really remarkable recoveries have been made in this glorious region irradiated by the sun and full of pure air charged with the balsamic odours of a pine-clad district.

Whilst, as I have said, there was rapid improvement made in the various services, the defect inherent in all administrations, English as well as French, but perhaps more particularly French, subsisted. For instance, M. Joseph Reinach, the well-known Deputy, has inveighed especially against the abuse of red tape in the hospitals. All sorts of dreadful formalities were necessary to be fulfilled to obtain a lemon or

a bottle of the simplest medicine. There had to be a proper requisition made with several signatures attached, and this entailed visits to different offices situated in different parts of the building—a formidable waste of time. Some string and nails, value 1 fr. 25, appeared in somebody's report. Immediately there was an imperious demand for details, which were supplied, of course—though purely imaginary. The precious document travelled during several weeks from the bottom to the top of the administrative ladder. Papers even pursue the unhappy doctor or stretcher-bearer right into the trenches—though, of course, every reasonable person would admit that records must be kept. M. Reinach, who, furnished with special powers of investigation, has carried his inquiries into every part, points out that even if the high administration decrees simplicity and the different sub-departments apparently incline, they continue their complicated practices just the same. Says M. Reinach, and his words will serve to depict the unhappy state of the public in this country as well as in any other: "We believe we are governed at one time by this party, at another by that. In reality, we are governed by the departments in the interests of a mysterious syndicate of paper merchants. It will require a revolution more profound than that of '89 to rid us of administrative routine." And it must be remembered also—one feels authorised to mention it since it is admitted by M. Reinach, as well as by other thoughtful Frenchmen—that favouritism and nepotism have made terrible ravages in this direction as in so many others; but these abuses have been corrected, we must hope, by the touchstone of war.

One of the most pleasing, and at the same time touching, sides of the war is the heroism in the hospitals. The majority of the patients belong to the class of manual labourer, but they were as dignified, as calmly Stoical, in their way as those who had larger opportunities for education. Though they had never read Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius, and were often just simple labourers, they showed invariably a greatness of soul. Women working in the hospitals have given me pathetic instances of soldiers' gentleness and resignation. They calmly watch the surgeon going about his work probing in their own flesh. They look on apparently unmoved, idly smoking a cigarette. Heroic simple souls of France. They are always joking, even before a most serious operation; one cannot overcome their invincible courage and good humour. Often it is touching enough. In the *Métropolitain* of Paris I travelled with a man who had lost his leg—one of the numerous army of the mutilated. In conversation he had forgotten to alight at a certain station. The train had already begun to move from the platform, and, to the alarm of those next to him, the poor fellow tried to jump out. He was pulled back just in time. "J'ai oublié," he said simply, looking reflectively at the empty trouser leg. In the hospital it is easier, perhaps, to be uncomplaining, to support with appearance of equanimity the pain and suffering of the wounds; it is more difficult in the evacuation stations, where sometimes the wounded have to stay a night exposed to all the discomfort of a provisional arrangement.

There are, too, pathetic instances of self-sacrifice. The "poilu" (as I have said elsewhere in this book) is a generous-hearted soul, very forgiving to his enemies,

even when they have done him unspeakable hurt; he will share food with the wounded Boche in the next bed. He will send him his comforts. "Here," he says to the nurse, "take this woollen waistcoat and give it to that chap over there; I have clothes enough." The humanity of the French and their intrinsic civilisation are revealed in the intimacy of the hospitals which are tended by those admirable women whose quiet and unadvertised devotion have inspired the admiration of every beholder.

Another very charming feature is the care taken of the permanently crippled. At Lyons, M. Herriot, the mayor, worked hard in this direction, and established schools where the mutilated could be taught useful trades. M. Maurice Barrès in Paris, chiefly by making use of columns in the *Écho de Paris*, worked for the same holy cause. One of the prettiest things is to go into a French hospital and see the semi-convalescents at work upon ingenious and charming little objects wherein they show their taste and inexhaustible ingenuity. They are never at a loss, these sons of France: a cunningly carved flower, an amusing caricature, a doll with articulated limbs, dainty little baskets—all these bear witness to the inherent culture and good taste that are theirs by right of birth, in virtue of having been born on the fruitful soil of France.

I have spoken of the bravery of the soldier as he lies under the surgeon's knife; but let us not forget the signal heroism of the surgeons themselves, and their staffs. They have given proof of a super-human courage and self-forgetfulness, and surgeons and doctors, stretcher-bearers and nurses, have frequently figured in the Army Orders for their abso-

lute devotion to duty. In many cases the enemy granted no truce for the recovery of the wounded, and it was necessary to seek them under a hail of bullets and shell fire. Wounds were dressed on the field of battle during the fight or in ambulances, which the Red Cross flag did not always protect from the bombardment of the Huns. In many cases it was perfectly evident that the building was the positive target of the enemy. The trained nurse, as we understand her in England, hardly existed at the outbreak of the war, but the women of the Red Cross worked in the hospitals and made up for a lack of professional training by a devotion without limits, and a whole-hearted willingness to learn and adapt themselves to the new conditions. It is true that no amount of good-will can supply the want of professional knowledge, but I have the testimony of many doctors that the better-educated Frenchwoman speedily acquired the essential part of hospital practice. The ladies who belonged to the various societies under the Red Cross were unpaid, and had gained their certificates after six-months' service in a hospital. Three societies form the Red Cross organisation in France: the Société de la Croix Rouge, the Société de Secours aux Blessés, and Union des Femmes de France. There is a religious basis to the French Red Cross, and before the war, before every woman who had leisure, rushed to offer her services to her beloved country, nursing in France was almost entirely in the hands of the Sisters of Mercy. True, in late years, in the course of the terrible struggle between Church and State, many of these splendid women had been driven from France, banished to carry their beneficence and charity to foreign climes. But when

the German hordes swept over the frontier, France was invaded by another silent army, an army of white-capped, calm-browed women, who with exquisite serenity moved to the beds of sickness and suffering. The nursing sisters returned to their kingdom, and the Head of the State bowed to receive them, for their heroism is matchless; they blench at no risks, they falter at no fear of infection; with placid brow they look, undismayed, at the most fearful sights, and the agonised patient, gazing into their steadfast eyes, gains strength and courage from the light of hope and faith that shines there. Never again will the Orders be banished from France.

And the priests on the battle-field showed equal devotion. Those who were of military age fought in the trenches side by side with the "poilu," and prejudice rolled away with the smoke of gunfire. Some again were stretcher-bearers, while those above fifty became chaplains and celebrated Mass in little improvised churches behind the lines. The soldier-priest gave a singular example of Christian courage, an absolute fearlessness which electrified the soldiers who were fighting by his side. I was at Perpignan a few weeks after a priest, who had lost an eye in the trenches, was decorated with the Legion of Honour by the General commanding the district. Truly the blood of these servants of Christ, spilt on the battle-field (and many have been killed), is the seed of the Church, and from their self-sacrifice and heroism will spring a harvest of love and charity, if not actually a revival of religion in France. It is, perhaps, too much to expect a general return to the paths of practising Catholicism, but at least France, having passed through the agony of blood and tears,

will have forged a spirit of splendid tolerance; for, as the greatest Healer and Physician came not to bring peace but a sword, the lasting peace that dwells in the heart of a nation is learnt from that supreme teacher, that incomparable healer, the sword.

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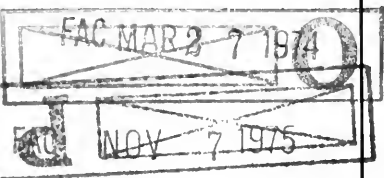


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